

# Danganronpa: New Students of Hope and the Camp Trip of Despair

by monodoof

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Summary: Danganronpa AU. 16 teenagers with remarkable talents have been chosen to attend the most prestigious school of the world. However, not everything goes as planned. Now, these students have been forced to participate in a very dangerous game that will put their lives at risk. Just what is going? Eventual Hijack warning.

## 1. 0 - Field Trip of Despair A

**\*\*DANGANRONPA: New Students of Hope and Camp Trip of Despair\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alright! Hello there! I'm Monodoof, the author of this fic- my first fic, at that! I know you're itching to just skip this and get into the story, but I have some things I want to say beforehand!<strong>

**\*\*First of all, while this is a story that has characters from Brave, Tangled and Frozen, this story will mainly focus on the RotG and HTTYD characters! The only reason I added the other characters was to fill in space because people don't like it when OCs interact with canon characters apparently? whatevs. In any case, what I said still stands; this will focus more on Hiccup and Jack than the other characters! The others will be glorified extras~\*\***

**\*\*Second of all, this fic will inevitably end in Hijack! or Frostcup? but yeah, just a heads up! Not decided on the other ships tho. We'll see what happens.\*\***

**\*\*Third of all, this will be a long fic! And maybe a bit slow? So if you're kinda impatient, I hope you don't mind...\*\***

**\*\*and lastly! (holy hell this is getting long), if you're wondering what the heck a Danganronpa AU is... I suggest you just read on and**

see for yourself! Much better that way! I will say, however, that its kinda like a Modern AU but with a twist. \*\*

\*\*This story will be told from Hiccup's point of view mainly, with some switches here and there that will be indicated! Without further ado, let's begin!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Was there even a need for an introduction? I mean, pretty much everyone knew about the enormous, almost bordering on excessive, building that stood proudly in the middle of the city. Built on the highest point of the area, the almost-castle like school stood over the many buildings surrounding it with ease.<p>

Yeah, you heard me well. This place was a school. A high school to be precise and when I say that it was enormous, I wasn't exaggerating. Not only it did it reach up to the sky, it also sprawled over the city for miles. It was its own, veritable, small kingdom.

You can only imagine the kind of kids that attend this high school, right?

And you would be correct on your assumption; Hope's Peak Academy was the very definition of 'we only accept the best of the best here'. Only the most elite could enter... And for a very good reason.

The school's purpose and motto is 'to raise the hope of this nation in order to give birth to a brighter, future'. And they weren't kidding about that. They went so far as to not accept applications. You had to be recruited by them personally. Only the most outstanding and talented students are scouted, and they would receive the best and most rigorous education in order to sharpen their talents.

And when I say 'talents', I mean 'true raw talent' . The people who graduate from this school are the best at their fields. Those who study at Hope's Peak Academy are assigned a title which represents their talents, in addition to to being called 'Ultimates'. Many important people who have graduated from this school are important figures in our world. Because graduating from Hope's Peak is synonymous with a brilliant, easy future.

Basically, attending Hope's Peak Academy was an impressive feat, and a great honor. Practically everyone dreams to attend this prestigious institution at least once in their life.

...Which brings us back to me.

My name is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Yeah, yeah, I can just picture your face right now, laughing at me. I don't mind, really. I'm far too used to it to care.

Anyways, I'm a 15 year old... fishbone of a high school student. Or so I'm told by my peers. B-but I'm not a fishbone! I swear I'm average...! It's just that everyone back at home are distant relatives of The Hulk! I have muscles! Don't let my twig-like arms deceive you! I'm strong! Why the other day I...

...Oh, right. Sorry. That's kind of a sore point for me... Anyways, I'm a high school student, ok? A normal high school kid who lives in

the village of Berk. We're kinda in the middle of nowhere, what with us living in an island, but despite our Viking ancestry, we aren't uncivilized or anything. Maybe a bit brutish, sure, but we manage somehow.

I was just minding my business back at home when suddenly, BAM! My father bursts right through the door of my room, a letter in hand and a big grin plastered right on his face... or well, under his thick forest of facial hair. I shot him a wave and a 'Hey dad, what's up?' before he shoves the letter he was holding right on my face, urging me to open it with a not so very subtle tone of excitement coating his gruff, deep voice that I wish I had.

If I hadn't known any better, I could have sworn I had died and gone to Valhalla. As I read who had sent the letter, I also felt excited. Why, you ask? Considering all I've been telling you, the answer should be obvious: I was holding a veritable of invitation for Hope's Peak Academy.

I couldn't believe it- and neither did my father- and he bombarded me with questions and praises; the later being a thing that never occurred... y'know, since I was always occupied being the family disappointment. I mean... when you live in Berk, someone with my... aerodynamic build certainly looks odd in a village full of hulking muscle mountains. I know my Dad (Who is among the biggest ones in the village and the Mayor to boot!) wanted someone big and strong but... what can you do?

But I didn't want to dwell on that negative thinking right now... I was too excited as I scanned the letter, reading the usuals 'We at this prestigious institution!' and the 'We'd be honored to have you!' and as I read thorough the letter I kept wondering why I had been picked by them. What had I done to be noteworthy? I mean... as far as I knew, I haven't done anything interesting except for that automatic feeding station I finished a few weeks ago, but was that noteworthy enough? Did my inventions catch Hope's Peak's attention? If not, what did?

I found the answer to that question on the bottom of the letter.

And let me tell you, the excitement I had felt a few minutes ago was tiny in comparison to the disappointment I felt after reading that line.

'As the winner of our raffle of this year, you, Mr. Haddock, have been selected as the Ultimate Lucky Student!'

I got... into Hope's Peak because of a raffle? Because of dumb luck?

...So, in the end, I was nothing special, huh?

My father noticed my falling mood and asked me what was wrong. I simply gave to him the letter and pointed out the part that had bothered me. Boy, if I was feeling bad now I felt worse at the look my father had on his face. It was clear as day, the disappointment on his face. All the noise and congratulations died down and what was left was an awkward silence that dragged on far too long for my liking. He finally broke the silence, awkwardly shuffling out of my room, excusing himself with a few mumbled 'you should rest' and

'better start packing for the trip'. Even in my disappointment, I couldn't just refuse such an invitation, right?

As I was left alone to pack absentmindedly, my thoughts started to wander.

What kind of talent is 'Luck'? Was I really so... average that my only redeeming quality was my dumb luck? Was I nothing special?

The more I thought about it, however, the more sense it made. It was true; I was nothing special. Not the strongest, not the quickest, nor the smartest and certainly not the most handsome. Sure, I invented stuff from time to time, but 7 out of 10 things I've built end up self destructing. I was just your plain, normal teenager who often blended in the background. These thoughts were my constant companions through all my years, and they even manifested during the long, silent trip towards the Academy. My father didn't even speak a word to me during the trip, but that was normal as well. I didn't even have the energy for small talk either.

After that uncomfortably long drive, I stood in front of Hope's Peak Academy's gates, letter of acceptance in one hand, and my bag full of personal things on the other.

...By Thor... this place is truly enormous.

Even though I had decided back at home that I wasn't going to waste this opportunity to prove myself, I almost decided to turn back to Berk. That thought died when I saw my father wave goodbye at me and wishing me good luck from inside the car. Yeah, really funny Dad. And like that, he left. Not even a glance back. Perhaps he was happy he had gotten rid of the worst Viking to ever live? Probably.

And I was left alone, standing in front of the school gates. It was a terrible feeling but not an unknown one. I was almost always alone, the only company I had enjoyed recently being the one of my best friend.

As I thought of him, I smiled. Sure, he was a little odd, but he was the best friend a boy like me could ever ask for. He and I were inseparable, and I was glad my request of him attending to school with me had been accepted. It would make the school years more bearable and besides, Toothless, my bud, was hopeless without me, I swear!

Yes, that's another name you can laugh at. Did I mention we vikings have a knack for ridiculous names?

Thinking about him gave me courage. Toothless wasn't anywhere nearby, but I no longer felt alone. I wasn't going to be alone! So with that confidence in mind, I decided to look around the campus a bit before he arrived, in order to get a feel around the place.

Grabbing my bag and clutching my letter, I took a step forward into the school, and into a small foyer, my mind buzzing with the prospects of the future: sure, my talent was crummy, but maybe after studying here I would learn about my true talent? Not to mention all the classes I would take, and all the people I would meet! Sure, these were going to be actually talented people, but even though I found the idea of meeting them intimidating, I was also eager to meet

the would-be celebrities!

All in all, I was scared, nervous, yet also excited and full of hope, but that was normal for a new student, right?

What was not normal, however, was the way the walls were wobbling. I mean what the heck? Walls and floors and everything shouldn't move like that. What's going on? I don't understand! Why... why am falling to the floor? Why can't I...move? Why is everything goin...g black...? M..my th...oughts... feel hea..v...y

Th...oo...th...less... wh...ere...? J...

Darkness. Even though it was a cliché description, that's what surrounded me. No matter how much I tried, nothing would cooperate. I couldn't move nor wake up, the grip of unconsciousness keeping me in place. I could do nothing but wait, and after coming to that realization, my consciousness drifted away to parts unknown.

**\*\*PROLOGUE: FIELD TRIP OF DESPAIR - BEGINNING\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alright, the next chapter will be up soon! Please tell me if I'm writing Hiccup right its my first time, haha.<strong>

## 2. 0 - Field Trip of Despair B

**\*\*PROLOGUE - MIDDLEGAME - FIELD TRIP OF DESPAIR\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well, this one took a while! Can you believe this chapter is like, thrice as long as the first one? I apologize in advance for this.<strong>

**\*\*Not a very exciting chapter here, in my opinion, since its mostly character introductions. And I'm not even done with them in this chapter. I felt it was getting kinda too long (10 pages!) so I had to split this chapter sadly. Still, I think the ending will satisfy some of you? idk I guess I'm pacified too easily haha\*\***

**\*\*Anyways, next chapter will be more interesting imo since the real plot will start but for now enjoy Hiccup being an awkward dork. I know I enjoyed writing him.\*\***

**\*\*I separated character introductions with break lines in order to make all the text easy on the eyes. So, yeah, go on! Read!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>As I opened my eyes, I was greeted by a different kind of darkness. Different how? Well, for one, I was actually conscious. This darkness wasn't absolute, either. More like, dim... with annoying, intermittent flashes of light... Gods, what was causing that flashing!<p>

I tried to get up from the floor. My limbs ached and I had that terrible after-sleep taste in my mouth but magnified by ten. Just how long had I been unconscious? Finally standing up, I noticed two very weird facts.

One, I was still in Hope's Peak Academy's foyer. What's weird about that? Well, everything! Because the foyer I had seen before had been reduced to a mere mockery of itself! Where once there was white, pristine floors there were cracked tiles caked in dirt and other substance I'd rather not examine.

Four glorious pillars used to support the ceiling of the foyer, but of the four now only one remained intact... the others reduced to rubble. The ceiling had previously hosted an impressive array of chandeliers but now all but one were nowhere to be seen, and the only one around was losing its illumination capacities, flashing weakly and constantly. Perhaps the most glaring difference, though, were the doors or windows. For you see, while the foyer I remembered had a nice number of them, the one I was seeing had none. Instead of having windows and doors, this mockery of a foyer had thick metal plates covering up every single window and door. And to top it all off, a set of surveillance cameras and what appeared to be guns were constantly aimed at us.

Yeah, I said us. Remember when I said I had noticed two weird things? Well, the second thing I noticed was that I wasn't alone.

Counting carefully, there were about other 15 kids laying unconscious around me. Or at least I wanted to think they were unconscious and not worse.

...All right... what in Odin's beard was going on?! Where am I?! Is this Hope's Peak Academy for real!? I remember walking into the school but this place had nothing to do with the part of the school I remembered! This looked like... like a dumpster! No... more like a war zone! Seriously, what's up with the windows and the metal plates and the guns?! This is all messed up! I didn't sign up for this! Did my father know about this? Did any of these kids know about this?

'WOULD JUST ANYONE TELL ME WHAT IS GOING ON?!'

Without meaning to, I had voiced that last thought rather loudly, the desperation inside me getting out of control. Now, I like to think that I am a rather level-headed person but this was a little too much, don't you think?

My outburst roused the other kids from their unconsciousness, apparently, because all of them were getting up. Nice! Maybe one of them would know what was going o-

My hopes went up in smoke when I saw the confused look on all of their faces, and sure enough, the same queries I had were voiced by them as well.

'Where am I?', 'Who are you losers?', 'What's going on, 'ey?!', 'Is this Hope's Peak Academy?!'

Their questions were getting louder and their voices were getting more agitated. This was bad... if this got out of control, people

could get hurt... Someone had to be the responsible one and calm them all down...

...I hate being the responsible one...

Gathering my voice as much as I could, I shouted: 'CAN YOU GUYS PLEASE SHUT UP FOR A BIT?'. OK, my voice kinda cracked a little towards the end, but hey... teenage boy voice, can't do anything about that...

In an instant, all eyes were on me. Aaalright... gotta keep this ball rolling... 'I-I know this looks pretty bad, but let's not get ahead of ourselves, OK? Let's all calm down and think this thoroughly before we do something we all regret...' OK, everything was going well...

'Why should we listen to a talking fishbone?!', said a snotty voice coming from an equally snotty-looking brat.

Great. Just what I needed. Another one who called me by that nickname. Fantastic.

'No no, he's right!', said a feminine voice coming from a blonde girl with the longest hair I'd ever seen, 'We should calm down and... assess the situation! Perhaps we can figure something out about this mystery!'

'I agree! Gathering information should be a priority on unknown situations', said a chubby kid with blonde hair tucked under a fedora.

'Well, I'll tell ya what I KNOW', said a lanky, blonde guy with a scowl in his face, 'We're trapped!'

'Well, that was insightful...', said a girl with pale blond hair that almost bordered in white.

'Well, what kind of info should we share?!', retorted the lanky guy again.

'How about introducing ourselves? That'd make things easier for all of us and maybe we'll learn something about our situation!', said a girl with the most colorful hair I'd ever seen. An amazingly bright suggestion.

'Fine by me', I said, with a shrug. 'Any objections?'

When there were none, I continued. 'OK, let's get this done.' I was trying to play it cool, but truth be told, I was kinda nervous. If my hunch was right, these guys were my classmates... which means they were almost like celebrities! I wasn't exactly thrilled to tell them about my stupid talent, but a viking's gotta do what a viking's gotta do...

I approached whoever was free and introduced myself to everyone individually... and the first one I introduced myself to was...

\* \* \*

><p>A small boy, with bright blonde hair spiked up in all directions,

who wore a simple yellow t-shirt with a black crescent moon styled on it, blue jeans and white sneakers. He was holding a sketchpad.<p>

'Umm... hello there! My name is Hiccup. I'm the Ultimate Lucky Student... who are you?' The boy stood staring silently at me, before he dove right into his sketchpad, hand moving across the page wickedly fast. Perhaps he was shy?

A few seconds later, the boy showed me what he had drawn, a smile in his face. On the sketchpad, a self portrait of the boy-a damn good one!-was displayed, along with a set of words.

'Sandy Onirico, the Ultimate Dream Interpreter... My talent consists of listening to people's dreams and interpreting their meaning and giving therapy when needed...?', I read, 'That's pretty neat! Way better than my own talent...'

Sandy again dove into his sketchpad and wrote the following sentence: 'Also, I'm mute.'

Well, that took me by surprise. 'Eh, don't worry. I won't make fun of you... I'm hardly in a position to do so and I know its not funny to be made fun of... besides, you seem like a cool guy.', I reassured him.

Sandy's grin grew bigger after I said so, his stance growing more relaxed. Again, his sketchpad flashed in front of me, a simple 'Thank you!' on the page, followed by a 'You seem pretty cool too, Hiccup!'.

I chuckled. 'Nah, I'm actually a loser... but never mind me... do you... know anything about this...?', I asked him.

His grin turned into a scowl and a frown. He wrote quite hastily this time, 'Don't say that! You're nice!', before I could answer, he started writing again, this time with a sad expression on his face, 'And no... I was invited to this school and as soon I stepped in I passed out... and I awoke here...'

Well, that wasn't very helpful. 'Ah well... guess I'll ask around then. Thanks, though.' As I turned to leave, I shook his hand and said; 'Nice meeting you, Sandy! Stay out of trouble!'. Sandy merely gave me a thumbs up and a smile.

Who should I ask now...?

\* \* \*

><p>Soon I spotted the lanky blonde from before. As I approached him, though, I noticed he wasn't alone. A rather similar looking girl with hair as long as the boy stood next to him, and they were arguing rather loudly. And physically. Maybe talking to them was a bad idea...<p>

'Oi, Fishbone guy!', the lanky guy said, as he spotted me.

Great. Chalk another up for my genes. Hilarious. Well... might as well introduce myself, no? I walked over to where they were and gave the same introduction that I gave to Sandy.



'What kind of name is Hiccup?', said the lanky blonde guy.

'Yeah, and what's up with your talent? Seems pretty lame.', the lanky blonde girl continued.

Not that I disagreed with her like that, but hearing your own talent being mocked by actually naturally gifted people kinda gets you down. Before I could get a word in, however, the blonde male spoke up.

'Whatever. Name's Tuffnut Thorston. You can call me Tuff for short.'

'And my name's Ruffnut Thorston, but Ruff is cool with me.' said the girl, pushing Tuff out of the way with a smirk.

Pushing against her, Tuff continued: 'Yeah? This loser you see here? She's my twin sister. Together we are known as the Ultimate Demolition Team.'

Huh! The way he worded that... well... I can admit when I'm curious... and these two guys certainly are... interesting. 'When you say... together... you mean...?'

Ruffnut suddenly put Tuffnut in a headlock and answered me: 'Yeah. We're twins so, the school probably got a kick out of it and registered us as a single student.'

Tuffnut managed to get out of the headlock and he tripped Ruffnut before continuing: 'Not like we care or anything. We kinda need to be together for our talent to work. Sadly.'

'And your talent consists of...?', I asked warily.

'DESTRUCTION!', said both of them at the same time. 'Demolition! Obliteration! Annihilation! Eradication!', they chanted, a blissful grin on their faces.

'Need something gone? Boom, we're there!' Tuffnut said, 'A wall in your way? BAM! It's gone!', Ruffnut chimed in.

'There's nothing that can stand in our way!' Tuffnut finally finished.

...Well, I can say for sure Hope's Peak Academy has its share of... unique people. Maybe I shouldn't mess with these guys. But I need answers, so I'm just gonna ask them if they-

'Well, you usually stand in my way.' 'Me? Tuff, you can't even drive a wrecking ball correctly.' 'And you can't even detonate a bomb!'

'I can!'

'No, you don't!'

'Yes, I DO!'

And now they're punching each other in the face. Marvelous. I guess I'll try my luck with another person...

\* \* \*

><p>As I left the bickering duo in my search of another person to interact with, I was surprised (no, shut up, I didn't scream) by the blonde girl with long hair that had spoken up before. She was wearing a pink dress, and was oddly shoeless, but by the grin on her face, she didn't seem to mind.<p>

'Oh, sorry, for startling you', she apologized, her grin only falling a little.

'W-who, me? Startled? No way! I was just... a little... surprised, yeah!' Great going, Haddock. Just great, you're already showing everyone how awkward you are.

Trying to cover up my embarrassment, I introduced myself. To no one's surprised, she giggled. Do I really have to go through this for another 12 times?

'Hiccup... what an interesting name... the world sure is full of surprises!', she said with a look of wonder in her face. 'My name is Rapunzel Solaris. I'm the Ultimate Painter! Nice to meet you!' she said smiling even brighter while extending her hand in greeting. Well, she certainly lives up to her last name.

I grinned back and shook her hand. 'Ultimate Painter, huh? Nice to see someone who is also artistically inclined', I said.

'But I thought your talent was Luck?', she quizzed.

'Well, I'm not very lucky if I ended up here, huh?', I answered. She laughed lightly and breathed a 'true' in between laughs. Suddenly, she sighed sadly, 'I just wish I knew how we ended here...'

Now this was awkward. Gotta lighten the mood somehow... 'Er... yeah, as I was saying... I actually draw in my free time. I guess I'm not THAT good, though... compared to you...' I paused before continuing, eyeing her reaction. 'What do you paint, Rapunzel?'

She instantly bounced back from her moody self, 'OH! I do landscapes, mostly! I was actually scouted because of my murals! Apparently the painting I did was so good that the church I painted it on got a lot of visits!'

'Really? That sounds amazing!', Now that's what I was expecting. Truly talented people. Not some awkward dork like me...

Remembering something, I snapped my fingers before speaking to Rapunzel, 'Hey, you know who draws as well?', and as I told her this I pointed to Sandy, who was smiling at the twins' antics. 'He's pretty good at it! His name is Sandy, and he's mute.'

Rapunzel's eyes shined with wonder, 'For real? A mute artist... how very interesting! I've got to check this out!' She started to run towards the small boy before stopping and turning around to say, 'Nice meeting you, Hiccup!'

'Yeah... my pleasure!', I answered as smoothly as I could. Which was almost not smooth at all.

And with that, she stormed off. These guys weren't so bad after all. Was I overreacting when I thought they would be different from me? Probably.

\* \* \*

><p>I was so deep in thought that I didn't notice the guy who had crept right behind me and grabbed my shoulder and Thor Almighty why was I getting subjected to this? What's this, Creep-on-Hiccup Day? The guy, who was very very tall, and also very very pale, chuckled softly at my totally manly screech.<p>

Now that I looked at him, he was very... unique looking. In addition to his pale complexion, he had yellow eyes and a pitch black hair. He wore an equally black vest over a gray t-shirt and also wore matching black pants and black formal shoes. Talk about making a fashion statement.

'Relax, I'm not going to harm you', said the guy in a low, smooth voice, 'No need to be afraid'.

Yeaaah... I was having second thoughts on introducing myself to this guy. But still... why shouldn't I? I mean, sure, I'm a viking but that doesn't mean I have to be rude...

I introduced myself and the guy laughed as expected. However, what I didn't expect was his answer. 'Hiccup, is it? Don't worry, you don't have to fear me or any bullying you'd expect because of your name. I'm not the kind of person to do so.'

'How did you-', I began, but the guy cut me off.

'How did I know? Let me explain. My name is Peter Black, but my... acquaintances... call me Pitch. I am the Ultimate Fear Expert', he said, a smile spreading through his lips. 'As you can assume from my title, I am very well versed on the subject of human fear. I can sense it, from words or body language, and from that I can learn a lot about the person in question', as he said that he started walking around me, his eyes scanning me over and over.

You didn't have to be a fear expert to tell that I was very freaked out.

'Their personality, their dreams, their secrets... all of that I can learn from tasting your fear. Given enough time, of course. But yes, I can learn all that from anyone and... use that information however I want...' another chuckle escaped Peter's lips and I shuddered.

I thought Hope's Peak admitted in talented people, not psychos!

'Now... I know what you're thinking...' Peter continued as he eyed me again. 'But as I said, do not fear me. I do not seek to harm you. I merely use my talent to help.'

At that, I shot a question in a distrusting tone. 'How can fear ever be helpful?'. I mean, I should know. Me and that emotion go way back.

I thought Peter would be angry at me for doubting him, but he merely chuckled. 'You will understand in time, but you have already seen the answer for yourself.' He finally stopped staring at me and turned around to leave.

'After all, it was fear what made you speak up back then when everyone was arguing, wasn't it?', he finished, leaving me staring at him dumbfounded.

'Hmm, you are interesting... you and that boy... I expected good things from you.'

And with that puzzling remark, he left.

...Damn it, I didn't even ask him if he knew anything!

\* \* \*

><p>Annoyed at my slip up, I didn't even notice I had walked into the snotty guy who had called me a fishbone before. The guy was clearly annoyed at me, and his face contorted in anger as he recognized me.<p>

Great. Making friends already. Such joy.

'The fuck do you want, fishbone?', said the snotty guy, pushing me back.

Okay, I was mad. Good thing I almost never get physical when I'm mad because now that I got a good luck at this guy... well, he was buff. And that was an understatement. He wore a brown tank top that was obviously picked to show off his body, along with some cargo shorts. His dark brown hair was long and straight, falling over his forehead, giving him a caveman look.

Yep, getting physical with this guy would certainly send me to Valhalla. So instead, I fought back with my best weapon, my sarcasm.

'Hey, I'm not a fishbone. My name is Hiccup and I just wanted to introduce myself and-'

'Pfft! Hiccup!? I'm not giving a loser like you, my name.' said the snotty guy. Why was even bothering with a guy that didn't even let me finish my sarcastic remarks?

Rubbing my forehead in order to calm down, I asked him: 'Then what I am supposed to call you?'

'You can call me Snoutlout', he said, with a very obvious tint of pride in his voice.

Wow, and I thought I had it bad with my name. Hearing this made me smile. Unfortunately, Snotlout saw my smile and confronted me instantly; 'What? You think this is funny? Are you making fun of the Ultimate Heavy Lifter?'

Fearing for my life, I instantly backed off and made up a ridiculous excuse on the spot: 'No! I was just... happy! Yes! Happy to have such a tough looking guy with such a tough sounding name around us! I... I

feel safer already!'

Snoutlout stared at me for a few seconds and... he smiled. I can't believe he bought that. I guess he isn't very smart...

A pat on my back broke my reverie. Snoutlout was patting me like an older brother and laughing. 'Hahah! Don't worry, Hiccup! You'll be safe around the mighty Snoutlout! I'll find a way out, you'll see!'

And with that, he left.

Certainly a very volatile and annoying person. Gotta have to avoid this one... my self-preservation instincts have never failed me so far.

\* \* \*

><p>Walking away from there a little faster than what I'd like to admit to, I was next spotted by a a tall, thin girl with a white labcoat, and a very colorful one piece dress. Her hair was all the colors of the rainbow and then some, and when she smiled, you could easily see a row of perfectly white teeth. When I smiled back at her, she instantly ran towards me. Huh, I'm guessing she's friendly then? I mean, she does look like the sort of girl that-<p>

Is she sticking her fingers inside my mouth?! Yeah, she definitely is. OK... this is definitely almost too friendly.

'Can you pleathe get your handths out of my mouth?', I asked with certain difficulty.

The girl reacted to my voice and she looked like she had snapped out from a trance. 'Sorry! I kinda get carried away when I see nice teeth... ', said the girl, blushing apologetically.

Well, I'm flattered, really. 'Ahaha... well, my teeth are nothing special, really...'

At that, she perked up, as if a switch had been flipped. 'Nonsense! They're clean and without blemishes! Sure, they're kinda crooked, but they fit you! They definitely compliment your cuteness!'

Great. Another blow to my self-esteem. Well, at least this girl thinks I'm cute... 'Well, thank you, miss...'

'Oh! Call me Ana Faerie! I'm the Ultimate Dentist! Most of my friends call me Tooth, though.'

Well, this talent I can understand! And well, I guess I'm not very surprised about her interest in teeth now. Still, I'd rather not experience that whole fingers-in-my-mouth thing again.

'Tooth, huh... I guess all of us in this school have weird names, heh...', and with that, I introduced myself. Surprisingly, Tooth didn't laugh at my name nor questioned my talent. Instead, she smiled and... now she's looking at my teeth again.

'It's a shame we're stuck in this place... I would love to make an appointment for you so that you could get some braces back at my

office', she said, edging dangerously close to my mouth. Nuh uh, you are NOT going to mess with my mouth again.

Stepping away from her, I changed the subject; 'Wait... your office...? Aren't you a little young to have your own business...?

At that, she merely laughed, 'Well, what can I say? I'm an entrepreneur! My parents helped me set up the place and I'm doing well!', however, that change in expression didn't seem 'well'. Before I could ask her what was wrong, she finished: 'I'm worried about my clients... I really hope we can get out of here soon'.

At that, I nodded weakly. I mean, I didn't have any reason to leave but I can understand her not wanting to stay here. It's a rather dreary place, even for a tough viking like me.

I promised Tooth that I would visit her office after we get out of here to cheer her up, but now I'm worried. How can I avoid that visit now...?

\* \* \*

><p>After parting ways with Tooth, I walked around and I was met by an unique sight. All of the students I've met were fraternizing already, and seeing them all interact with each other honestly made me relax. Hearing laughs certainly made this weird situation more comfortable and easy to bear. However, I noticed a pair of girls at the back of the foyer, staying away from everyone.<p>

Now, I wasn't exactly a social butterfly, but I know how it feels to be left out... honestly, on a scale from 1 to 10, being excluded was a 7 to me. With a courage that I didn't know I had in me, I approached the two girls.

Their reactions to my presence were... one of a kind, to say the least.

The girl on the left, a girl with light brown hair and green eyes that wore a a hiker's ensemble, blushed and laughed at me. Incredible, I hadn't even said a word and I was being mocked already? Must be a new record.

The other girl, this one I recognized... it was the pale blonde-haired girl from before. She wore a stunning blue dress that looked like it was made of ice, and her equally blue eyes were staring daggers at me.

What did I do to earn these reaction? Honestly?!

Still, I came over with a mission, and I was going to complete it. I introduced myself to the girls and... remember the blushing and the evil glare I mentioned before? Yeah, after introducing myself, those rose in intensity. At this point I would have preferred the usual laugh and mockery I got from my name and talent.

The brown haired girl was the first to speak, 'Nice to meet you! I'm Anna of Arendelle. I'm the Ultimate Hiker!' She said with a smile, 'And this,' she said, motioning to the girl next to her, 'is my sister, Elsa of Arendelle. She's the Ultimate Figure Skater!'.

At those words, Elsa's expression turned to one of anger. Note to self: this apparent Ice Queen had a fiery temper.

Elsa spoke softly to her sister, but in all honestly she was terrible at whispering, 'cause I heard the whole thing anyway; 'Anna! Should we really trust him? We don't know any of these guys.'

Anna didn't take the hint from her sister's tone of voice and spoke in a normal voice volume: 'Well, we now know him, technically! He's Hiccup! So he's not a stranger anymore!'

'Still, Anna!', said Elsa, not whispering anymore, 'We shouldn't let our guard down and get all friendly with these strangers! They might have been the ones that kidnapped us!'

Now, being falsely accused wasn't going to fly with me. 'Uh, in my defense, I only asked you girls your names because I don't know you. I mean, logically speaking, that's... the most logical thing to do, no...?'

OK, that might have come out far more sarcastically than what I intended.

Anna laughed at my comment but Elsa was definitely not amused. Sheesh, if looks could kill.

'See? He's not so bad!', said Anna.

'...You only say that because you think he's cute...' said Elsa in that failed whispering of hers.

At this comment, Anna blushed furiously and she shoved Elsa slightly in annoyance.

Wow, awkward much? Yeah, I think I'd better leave.

Coughing a little, I told them I had to go, but I reassured them it was nice meeting them. Anna's expression was crestfallen but I'm pretty sure Elsa was smirking at the awkwardness she had caused between us. Reminding me again not to cross her, I walked away from there, fighting an odd feeling that I was being watched...

\* \* \*

><p>As I made my way back to the center of the room, I noticed a lot of movement coming from the opposite corner to the room. Walking all the way over there, I saw two girls. One of them had blonde hair braided into a ponytail and she wore a red headband. She was wearing a camo sleeveless t-shirt and metal shoulder pads, a red skirt and black leggings completing her attire, along with some combat boots. The other girl had a wild mane of red hair, and wore an elegant, emerald green dress. A quiver was strapped on her back, along with a nice longbow.<p>

Oh, and these girls were fighting hand to hand as well. Guess I should have mentioned that. And when I mean fighting, I don't mean a silly slap fight like the ones you see after class. No, I meant an actual fight with technique. And it was getting heated... why no one else had seen the girls fight was beyond me, but now that I had seen

them going at it... well, I had to stop them before things got out of hand.

The Mr. Responsibility inside me is having a field day.

Awkwardly calling out to them as I approached them, the girls stopped and looked at me with a scowl.

'Hey, I know we're all stressed and all, but there's no need to get physical on each other- Whoa! What was that for!?' The blonde girl had thrown a jab at me and I narrowly managed to catch her fist with my hand. Now I'm glad I took at least some of those self-defense lessons from my dad seriously...

The blonde girl and the redhead smiled, and she lowered her hand. 'Not bad, kiddo', said the blonde, 'Looks like you aren't all talk after all...'

Yeah, yeah, fishbone insult #9 of the day. 'Well, to survive on Berk you kinda have to at least be able to stop a punch...'

At this, the girls perked up, the redhead saying, 'No way! You, from Berk?! Guess you can't judge a book by its cover!'

'No kidding', said the blonde, eyeing me with her blue eyes, 'What's your name, warrior of Berk?'

'OK, first of all, I'm no warrior. I think I barely reach the squire tier in terms of power. Just because I come from the famous town of Viking Warriors of Berk... it doesn't mean I want to be one...' I told the girls before introducing myself.

'Well, for not being a warrior, you sure have the reflexes of one! I'd bet if you really focused on it, you could be very good! Heck, we could train together! I always wanted to train with Berkian Warriors!', said the redhead eagerly.

I shook my head, 'Nah... I really dislike confrontations... I'd rather avoid trouble... and I'm not the very best of my village so I can't train you that good either so.. sorry for disappointing you, Miss..'

At that, the redhead slapped her forehead. 'D'oh! Where are my manners? Mother would have had a field trip with this slip-up of mine... my name is Merida DunBronch! I'm the Ultimate Archer!'

'And, I'm Astrid Hofferson, the Ultimate Warrior', said the blonde who took my hand and shook it firmly. No, I didn't wince a bit at all shut up.

Awkward silence. Need to find a topic of discussion.

'So, Hiccup...'

Bless you, Astrid, for speaking up first!

'What kind of weapon do you prefer?', said Astrid, studying me again with those blue eyes. Was she sizing me up?

'Well, I can't really lift any of the weapons everyone else uses



so... I mainly use rapiers and short swords.' I said while I rubbed the back of my head nervously.

Merida almost bounced from happiness at hearing this: 'Really? Hey, Hiccup! I wanna spar with you! I need new sword-fighting opponents!'

I was taken aback, to say the least. I politely declined for two reasons: one, we didn't have any swords, and two, I don't like the idea of pain.

Merida looked angry but Astrid kept looking at me. Did I have something on my face? Well, aside from... everything that was my face?

Finally, I asked her: 'Is there... something wrong Astrid?'

Astrid simply smiled and said: 'Your hands... are callous... for someone who doesn't like combat, that's pretty weird, don't you think?'

Oh. That? I thought it was something more important than that. I merely shrugged and told her: 'Well, I guess hands tend to turn out like that when you work the forge...'

They both looked at me dumbfoundedly, before Merida spoke up again: 'You? At a forge? You make weapons?!'

'Uh, yeah. And occasionally some of my own inventions...', it was weird, getting all this attention.

Astrid laughed, 'You're just full of surprises, aren't you, Mr. Luck?'

Merida laughed as well, and continued: 'Tell me about it! Once we get out of here, I think I'm gonna visit Berk specifically for you!' Astrid apparently thought the same as Merida, and said the same thing

Well, wasn't this nice? I'm going to get my butt kicked in my hometown by two girls. Y'know, staying trapped here didn't seem so bad now...

Still, after talking some more with these girls, I learned they weren't that bad. They were genuinely curious about the weapon making process and they actually laughed at my sarcasm. With a farewell punch on the arm courtesy of Astrid, I left them in a much brighter mood. Sure, all of these guys were way better than me, but they were also people, like me. And as I started to meet them all, I couldn't help but think that I was overreacting earlier. I thought for sure that I was going to be looked down on by all of them but now? I can actually say with confidence that most of them like me to some degree, and that was honestly an improvement over my apparent invisibility I had back in Berk.

Well, some of them seemed to hate my guts, but that's life, huh?

With a new confidence on my step, I proceeded to meet the rest of my classmates, almost forgetting our actual situation.

...But still, that feeling of being watched... I mean, there are 15 people here aside from me, so me being watched isn't something unthinkable... so why am I worried? Reprimanding myself for being paranoid, I approached a giant looking man clad in a red Christmas sweater...

\* \* \*

><p>My name is Jackson Overland. I am a 17 year old student of Hope's Peak Academy. I have a sister and...<p>

Damn it, not again. Why can't I remember anything beyond that?

Ever since I woke up in this room with all these guys, I've been having these memory problems. I only interacted with these guys in hopes that talking to them would trigger a memory, but even after talking to all of them, nothing happened. And don't get me wrong, they're all nice and fun people, from what I gathered and I genuinely enjoyed their company after talking with all of them

Well, all of them but him. This one guy... who I hadn't talked to...

And there he was again, running to meet up with Nick, who hugged him in a tight embrace. That's the guy, the one who calmed all of us down when we woke up in panic.

I hate to admit it, but hearing his voice calmed me down a lot. It's not like the guy's voice was pretty or anything, in fact it was a bit nasally, but his voice seemed familiar.

In fact, almost all of him was familiar to me. His messy auburn hair, his green eyes, the freckles on his face, the stupid crooked smile and his small build. Yes... this guy... I feel like I know him...

Except, that... that I don't know his name. I mean, if I recognize this guy, I should probably at least know his name no?

But try as I might, I can't remember anything. And yet, seeing him doesn't really confuse me. Whenever I talked to these guys, I felt nervous, but seeing this fishbone of a guy... actually puts me at ease.

Just who is he? Does he know me? Does he know anything about me? And why isn't he talking to me? I mean, everybody else flocked towards me due to my white hair and appearance, but this guy? He has completely ignored me.

And he's never alone! I want to talk to him on private because I don't want my amnesia to be common knowledge, but every time I look for him, he's already chatting it up with someone else! For some reason, the fact that this guy is ignoring me is angering me more than it should. I mean, he's a stranger, and here I am, hoping he will at least look at me!

So here I am, watching this little guy run around, hoping that he will finally notice me in hopes that I can talk to him so that I can learn something about myself.

And you know what's the worst part of all this? I actually am enjoying seeing this guy move around, talk and laugh.

...Just who are you, fishbone guy?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So yeah, Jack Frost tease. What kind of tease did you think I was?<strong>

\*\*Not very confident on my Jack Frost, tbh. Any tips for him will be greatly appreciated and any thoughts on my writing will be appreciated as well.\*\*

\*\*Monodoof out!\*\*

### 3. 0 - Field Trip of Despair C

\*\*PROLOGUE - ENDGAME - FIELD TRIP OF DESPAIR\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monodoof here again! I know I said I would split the previous chapter and this one and I intended to post this chapter along with the past one but after some mulling... I rewrote this entire chapter. Now, the character introductions became more concise and I actually get to move forward with the plot! I'll probably rewrite the past chapter too but that will be done later! For now, enjoy!<strong>

\_\*\*Hiccup's POV unless stated otherwise\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>Meeting the Ultimate Sculptor and the Ultimate Survivalist shouldn't have been this painful, but Nicholas North, the after mentioned sculptor, was a very affectionate man. A shame he expressed that affection in the way of back-breaking bear hugs. Aster Bunnymund, the survivalist, only added salt to the injury by snickering at my suffering.<p>

Still, with all being said and done, they weren't such bad guys. Nicholas was huge and intimidating at first, but he was a jolly man who shone with innocence. And had a penchant for wearing Christmas sweaters even in this heat.

Aster, however, was less jolly, but that was to be expected. This boy sure looked like he went through some hard stuff and he showed it all over his lean, muscled body. I didn't even know you could get a scar there of all places! Still, the guy had a dry sense of humor, and for that, I appreciated him. At last, someone on whom I can use my Hiccup Brand sarcasm!

Even as I met the rest of the students, the surprises never stopped! For example, there was Flynn Rider (Totally a fake name, by the way. I should know. My name is Hiccup after all) who was an Ultimate Thief! Why would Hope's Peak Academy foster a criminal is beyond me, but hey! They accepted me, right? Still, I never expected a thief to

be such a charismatic and loud person... but he seemed cool!

And then there was this guy who preferred to be known as Fishlegs. Apparently he is the Ultimate Encyclopedia, and boy did it show! This guy had an immense wealth of knowledge... and an irritating urge to spew them during conversation. Despite his smartness, the boy was surprisingly meek and timid and I could relate to him like this more easily. After learning about how leeches were used to treat wounds, though, I kinda had to back off. Like, Too Much Information, yeah?

Yep, this school had a vast array of personalities! Even though I was pretty boring in comparison to them, I was grateful to Hope's Peak for allowing me a chance to meet them! All 14 students...

Wait... 14?

I thought there were 15 people here aside from me? Did I miss someone?

At my realization, I started to look around for whoever I had missed. Geez, I can't believe I ignored someone here... what if they hate me? I mean, not like it really matters if they hate me in the end but I'd rather not have another person against me.

It only took me about 10 more seconds before I spotted the person I was missing.

...OK, how did I manage to miss this kind of person?

Striking blue eyes were looking straight at me, a smirk spreading across this guy's face. Gaudy white hair stood out like a sore thumb and his pale skin only seemed to compliment his face. Like, this guy was incredibly handsome. Looks like someone got very lucky in the genes department.

As I approached the guy, I took notice of the rest of his appearance. He wore a blue hoodie and brown cargo pants and black sneakers. Geez, this guy totally screamed 'Mr. Popularity'. I don't want to judge a book by its cover but I dreaded his personality. Like, seriously! Cool clothes? Check. Illegally handsome? Check. I really hoped he wasn't one of those jock-like guys who picks on nerds like me. I didn't need that kind of plot line on my high school life.

Finally, after a walk that felt eternal, I stood in front of the guy. Gulping, I waved my hand nervously and muttered a quiet 'hello'. Alright, Haddock, don't mess this up...!

The guy in front of me smiled at my feeble greeting and oh Gods, why am I not surprised that his smile was perfect? This was doing a number on my already frail self-esteem.

The guy finally broke the silence and extended his hand to greet me. I awkwardly took it and shook it perhaps a bit too strongly. Realizing I hadn't let go of his hand, I dropped it hastily and coughed awkwardly. This was getting weird.

And no, I don't mean it that way. It's not like I'd never date a guy or anything (You kinda learn to not be picky when no one even looks at you), but... for some reason, holding this total stranger's hand

felt... so right. Like I had done so a million times before. In fact, this total stranger... seemed familiar.

See what I meant by weird?

The guy looked disappointed by my previous action, so I actually talked this time to mend the awkward atmosphere: 'Hey... Uh... so... my name is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, and I'm the Ultimate Lucky Student... and you are...?'

Smooth, Haddock, very smooth. Not.

Unsurprisingly, the guy in front of me exploded into a fit of laughter, but that didn't bother me much. I much preferred this than the look of disappointment he had previously.

After catching his breath, the stranger finally managed to utter an 'I'm sorry'. Straightening himself up, he continued: 'It's just... such an unusual name...' Coughing a little, he introduced himself: 'My name is Jackson Overland!' he said with a bit of pride on his voice, puffing his chest a little.

I laughed at that action. So this guy is Mr. Confidence, huh? I wonder what kind of talent got him here?

'So what kind of talent does the almighty Mr. Overland possess? Ultimate Good Looks?' I asked him, teasingly.

I was taken aback when his demeanor suddenly deflated. Had I said something wrong? Was his talent really that bad... or did I get it right?

Looking at me warily while he fidgeted with the hem of his hoodie, he paused before he asked me hesitantly in a low voice: '...Can you keep a secret?'

I nodded slowly, looking around to see if anyone else was near to eavesdrop. Seeing that one was paying attention to us, I edged closer to Jack to hear his secret. For some reason, Jack smiled at this gesture.

After a moment of hesitation, Jack whispered: 'I... actually don't remember my Ultimate skill or title... for that matter... I don't remember anything from before I got to this school.'

I looked at him with surprise. Now his deflating mood made sense. Still, in these cases, pitying him wouldn't be helpful at all. At least, I didn't like to be pitied whenever something bad happened to me. Trying to lighten the mood, I nudged him playfully and teased him: 'W-well, if its any consolation, you could totally pass for Ultimate Good Looks...'

To my relief, he actually perked and laughed. Pushing me harder than I expected, he retorted: 'No way, man! I don't want to have such an useless talent!'

Laughing, I pushed him back while giving a retort of my own: 'How are good looks a bad talent? It's better than Luck! At least with good looks you can get a girlfriend easily!'

Jack grimaced a little at that comment but he immediately perked up and grabbed me in a playful headlock: 'Why would I want a girlfriend?', he said while he started giving me a noogie, 'At least with good luck you can win the lottery and be rich!'

Managing to escape from the headlock, I caught my breath and rolled my eyes: 'Well, you're not mooching off from me if I ever get that lucky...'

Jack suddenly grabbed my arm and he leaned on it while a mock whinny tone coated his words: 'C'mooooon Hiccup! You can't just abandon your memory-less friend in the streets without any money, can you?'

The fact that this 17 year old could pull off a sad puppy face was impressive, to say the least. However, I had faced and endured better sad puppy faces than the one Jack was trying to pull on me, so I instead pushed him back and rolled my eyes at the faked look of hurt that Jack now carried. Still, the fact he had joked about his situation made me smile. It meant he was coping with his memory loss a lot better than before.

We spent a lot of time talking about a variety of topics, mostly about me since he didn't remember much about his personal life. I told him the origin behind my name (an old Viking tradition of naming the runt of the family a 'Hiccup'), I told him about what I did in my free time (I thought this was boring but Jack was pretty attentive and actually asked me to show him my drawings, weapons and inventions) and I told him about all the unfortunate mishaps in my life that made me wonder if my real title was 'Ultimate Unlucky Student' (We do NOT talk about the Yak-nog incident). All the while cracking smart-ass remarks and bouncing off each other the most ridiculous witty one-liners you'd ever hear.

Talking with Jack felt so natural. It was as if I had suddenly reunited with an old friend. An amnesiac friend, but a friend nonetheless.

...Friend...

It honestly embarrassed me that Toothless had slipped my mind. Suddenly a wave of anxiety shot through me as I finally focused on my best friend's whereabouts. Was he OK? Did he get captured and get tossed in here? So many questions and scenarios popped in my head and with each one my anxiety increased.

I guess it showed in my face because Jack suddenly asked me if I was OK.

And I wanted to hold my worries back. Repress them and say that I was fine, like I always did. But I didn't, because I felt that Jack would understand me. Pathetic, no? What kind of logic was that? I just went and vented on a guy who I was just starting to know and befriend.

Why was I even telling him about Toothless? Toothless was one of the secrets of the village and I wasn't supposed to tell any outsider about him. And yet... despite only knowing him for a few hours, I already trusted this white haired idiot enough to tell him about my bud.

...Oh, yeah... I never told you guys about Toothless in-depth, right? Truth is, Toothless isn't human. He's a dragon. And not just any dragon, no sir. He is the last known member of the Night Fury species, a dragon so powerful and fast that was also known as the 'Unholy Offspring of Lightning and Death itself'... buuut, personally speaking, Toothless was just a big goof. Sure, he had an attitude (My father had the nerve to say he took after me!), but he was a smart, fun-loving lizard and he was extremely loyal and understanding.

After I was finished telling Jack what was on my mind, he... well, had to lie down for a bit. It's not every day that you learn dragons are real. Still, I was relieved to see he believed me. I was never gonna say it out loud, but it meant the world to me that someone actually believed in me. Talking to him also helped me calm myself.

Of course, Jack started asking questions after he recovered from the shock, unsurprisingly. If I had learned anything from the guy, it was the fact that he was very curious.

'What color is he?!' Black.

'Can he really fly and breathe fire?!', Yeeep.

'Why have I never seen a dragon?!', They're pretty rare and are only native to the Berk area. We kinda protect them, but only I actually interact with them. The other villagers are actually fearfully respectful of them.

'So you're a dragon conqueror?!', Now this made me mad. 'No, Jack, I don't conquer them, I just... talk to them. They can understand me and I can understand them. They're not my servants... they're my friends... Toothless is my friend.' I don't know why I was the only one in the village to do so.

Jack closed his eyes and nodded in apparent understating. A teasing grin appeared as he nudged me in the rib with his elbow, 'Still, Hiccup, that's pretty impressive! You can't deny that living with dragons isn't anything short of amazing!'

At that, I had to nod. I smiled as I remembered my first flight with Toothless, the exhilarating feeling of wind in my face and the surge of adrenaline I got whenever we went into a free fall. It was during those moments that I truly felt at home, comfortable with who I was. 'Yeah, he is pretty amazing, alright...'

Jack placed a hand on my shoulder and told me in a soothing voice: 'Relax, Hiccup. I'm sure he's fine! I mean, he is the Unholy Offspring of Lightning and Death itself after all!'

At hearing those words, I calmed down a bit. Muttering a sincere 'thanks' to Jack, I started to believe I was overreacting. Toothless would be fine! He was a dragon! Dragons are tough! Hell, I bet Toothless was looking for me right now! Yeah, nothing to be worried about!

...Of course, thinking like that was foolish. Daring to hope in a place like this? Soon enough I would learn that this optimistic way of thinking of mine wasn't welcome on this dreadful place that

relished in its destruction of all hope.

It all happened in an instant. No one could have predicted it. Not even an Ultimate Clairvoyant. Everyone was just chatting idly with each other, a weird mixture of energetic conversation and calm.

All that calmness was taken abruptly and torn to shreds by the horrible noise that flooded the opposite side of the room, which had exploded in a violent burst of concrete, dust and metal.

The dust cloud that rose from the impact dampened our vision, and everybody started to ask if everyone was OK. To our relief, everyone was accounted for and no one was seriously injured. We enjoyed a brief respite of security, a fake moment of happiness, before the dissipating dust cloud revealed to us the cause of such explosion.

What we were seeing defied common sense. A school bus had literally burst through the wall as if it were nothing, thick metal plates that previously covered the windows of that wall be damned. The bus was oddly intact as well.

However, my eyes only lingered on the bus for a few seconds before they focused on a dark form that lingered in front of the vehicle.

It was large, yet slim... its... scaly skin and big wings a deep black... \_and... and he was so battered and bloody... an..d! And...! Oh Gods... his tail was missing a fin and blood was coming profusely out of it...! Not stopping... pooling under him...!\_

This familiar form... it couldn't be... Toothless...! You're... just messing with me... right bud? Please... ! Get up... greet me like you always do... \_please, bud... open your eyes... please...!\_

I didn't notice when I moved, but I was already hugging him, not caring about getting soaked in blood. I gasped as I saw the severity of his wounds, lacerations and cuts so deep that made it hard to look at them. I sobbed when I saw his tail fin missing, panicking at the amount of blood that was pouring out. And as I sat there, trying to think on how to stop the bleeding and how to save my best friend and cursing myself for not being able to do anything, I heard a noise I couldn't believe I was hearing.

A sound I would grow to loathe for the rest of my days.

A laugh.

A big, booming, cartoony laugh. Cheerful. Mocking. Fake. A laugh meant to sound full of happiness but lacking any feeling. An empty, artificial sound that mocked me yet also chilled me down to my very core. A laugh that cackled at everything yet at nothing.

A laugh full of despair.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I'm sorry yet I'm not. <strong>

\*\*Next chapter has one of my fave characters and I always look



forward to writing him! \*\*

\*\*In any case! Please review! I really do need the help!\*\*

#### 4. 0 - Field Trip of Despair D

\*\*PROLOGUE - ENDGAME 2 - FIELD TRIP OF DESPAIR\*\*

\*\*So! Here we go again! Not much to say this chapter except that... well, I have some good news at the end of it!\*\*

\*\*For now, let's dive in into the story!\*\*

\_\*\*Jack's POV this time around.\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>The world as we know it has a very firm set of laws that governs it. These rules dictate what is possible and what is not, and that is what we accept as our 'reality', what passes as normal.<p>

What was happening right now broke all the rules of that reality, of that normalcy.

Not having memories is certainly not 'normal'.

Dragons being real was absolutely not normal either.

And that... thing who was laughing so hard that it had to hold its belly was not even close to my definition of normal.

Because what was in front of me was a stuffed toy in the shape of a bear. A stuffed toy that moved so effortlessly that it looked alive. A stuffed toy that laughed.

See what I mean?

What was in front of me was utterly bewildering, and yet it stood there, so out of place in this place. This thing... awoke something inside of me. A sense of dread so out of nowhere that it almost seemed primal. As if fearing this thing was a necessary instinct.

And yet, instead of running away from this stuffed toy, I found myself moving towards Hiccup, who was a crying mess. I instinctively stood in-between him and the stuffed toy, my back towards the freckled boy. I don't know why I did it, but it somehow felt right. Looking at the boy over my shoulder, I noticed just how miserable and frightened he was as he held the dragon in a hug. It was clear to me now that this dragon, who I assumed was Toothless, was very important to him. Somehow, this realization gave me a burst of courage. Why? I don't know, but this day was full of questions without answers.

Using that courage, I turned my head to stare at the stuffed bear. Now that I had my full attention on him, I noticed just how odd this stuffed toy really was. It wasn't very big, truth be told. Just about 30-ish centimeters or so tall. What was odd about him was his design; the bear was separated in two distinct sides by the middle. The left

side of the bear was pure white, the only thing interrupting that pureness being a small, black spot-like eye. The left side was so normal looking that it actually made the right side of the bear more out of place. The right side of the bear was pure black, which accentuated the eerily big red eye which was shaped in an odd 'W'-like form. To complete the off-setting look, the right side possessed a big grin, totally in opposite to the more ordinary mouth of the left side.

This... bear and its existence was a contradiction and its design reflected that.

No one was moving, everybody either looking at the bear or the dragon, still in shock.

Finally, the bear spoke. He jumped off from the school bus' roof and landed just a few feet in front of me. I visibly tensed my stance as he did this but he paid me no mind as he addressed us all.

And when he spoke, he did so in such a cheerful tone that was so out of place that it actually made me shudder.

'Hey! Howdy! Hello! Is everyone here, then? Good! Now let's get things rolling!', said the toy as he danced around with every word he said.

That cartoony tone of his... veiled something sinister. It was as if a vortex of malice was hiding behind those words.

'Sorryyyyyy for the delay! Something got in my way as I drove here but I simply smashed it to bits just like this wall here, ha ha! In any case, don't worry anymore children! Your beloved Headmaster Monobear, that's me, has finally arrived!'

After hearing those words, everyone snapped out of their dazed state, seemingly processing the meaning behind Monobear's words.

Soon, questions were flung towards the self-proclaimed Headmaster.

'Is that stuffed toy... moving?!', asked Tuffnut.

'Don't be alarmed! I'm sure it's just a very complex robot or something...' said Fishlegs in an unsure tone. The boy was actually sweating bullets and he looked scared.

'How rude! I am not a stuffed toy!', said Monobear in response, stomping his feet in anger. 'I am Monobear! I am waaaay too technologically advanced to be classified as a mere toy! NASA is so jealous of me, it's unbearable! And as I have already told you... I am Hope's Peak Academy's Headmaster!'

'So, this really is Hope's Peak...', said Pitch in a thoughtful tone.

'Of course it is! I thought you guys were Ultimates, not Dumb-timates, sheesh! Where else would you be!?', said Monobear in response, mockingly.

This time, Aster stepped forward, shouting. 'Well, this place looks

like a dump! O' course we we're wondering where the 'ell are we!'

Tooth also stepped forward and spoke: 'Yeah! If this really is Hope's Peak Academy... then why is it like this? I hardly think such a prestigious school would look like a war zone!'

At this, Monobear dropped his head, in an attempt to look sad, but his tone of voice still had that fake, forced feeling when he spoke. 'Yes, about that... that's why I've come to pick you guys up, you know? Hope's Peak Academy is going through some serious trouble... and as your Headmaster, it is my duty to protect you guys... so...!'

Doing a little spin in place, Monobear looked at us in an what I suppose was an attempt at a smile, speaking after he finished spinning: 'That is why we at the Hope's Peak Academy Committee have decided to take you guys in a mandatory Field Trip while we take care of this situation! Did I mention it was mandatory? Puhuhuhu!'

A tense silence followed Monobear's giggle.

None of this made any sense.

I didn't remember much of my time before here and even I knew this wasn't right. Everyone else started to voice their confusion soon enough.

'Hold on! This makes no sense at all!', said North.

'Yeah! I read the school pamphlet like, 30 times and it made no mention of any situation, field trip or you!', said Rapunzel.

'Yeah! I'm not going on any fucking field trip! I only came here to study in this place because they promised a bright future! I didn't sign up for this bullshit!', shouted Snoutlout.

Monobear just stood there as everyone voiced their discomfort. I wanted to say something too, but I was too focused on Hiccup to do so. The boy had stopped crying and he was now looking at the Headmaster with a thoughtful glare, his green eyes tinted red from all the crying.

A sigh pulled my attention back to Monobear. The Headmaster just shook his head before he spoke.

'The youth of today are really stupid...' and then, the malice that had been hidden behind his cheerful tone finally surfaced as he continued, 'Do you bastards know the meaning of the word 'mandatory'? I REALLY hope I don't have to explain this to you. You are to attend this Field Trip without exception.'

The Headmaster lifted his left paw and a very sharp looking set of claws popped out from it. 'Do you understand? You are not to disobey your Headmaster. Really, I thought kids like you would have at least that much common sense.'

Astrid and Merida suddenly stepped forward and looked down at the bear without fear. Astrid spoke first. 'I think you're the one who lacks common sense'. Astrid bent down and reached under her skirt,

pulling a small combat knife from who knows where before pointing it at the bear.

Merida followed suit and took aim at the bear with her bow, 'Yeah. I mean, you do realize we outnumber you? You really can't force us to do anything, oh so called Headmaster.', she said with a smirk on her face.

Monobear just looked at them and as Merida let an arrow fly towards him, he sighed as if he were disappointed.

Everything happened so fast.

Suddenly Monobear had vanished from where he stood. As I looked around for him, I heard Astrid gasp and I turned around to look at her.

Monobear was clinging to her back, holding the arrow Merida had shot at him in his paw, pressing it near Astrid's neck.

'You bastards really are foolish.' said Monobear in his cheerful voice, though it sounded colder than usual. 'I already told you. You are not to oppose me. You are to board that school bus and to attend this Field Trip peacefully. Are we clear now?'

No one moved, everyone still trying to process what was going on. Had Monobear really moved faster than an arrow? It was as if the laws of this world didn't apply to him.

Annoyed at the lack of a response from us, Monobear hopped off from Astrid's back and walked towards the bus before declaring: 'You know, I really hope you guys aren't planning to overthrow me with your superior numbers...'

As if in response, hundreds of Monobears came out of the school bus, standing next to the one addressing us. Everyone's hope in the plan of overpowering Monobear went up in smoke at the sight.

We all realized it at the same time; our situation was completely hopeless. There was no choice for us but to comply.

Satisfied with the look on our faces, Monobear waved his black paw and dismissed the other stuffed toys, who disappeared as fast as they had appeared.

'Beary well, then! Nice to see you bastards finally grasping just how stupid it is to defy me. Now everyone, board the bus! We're going on an exciting Field Trip you'll never forget!'

As everyone grudgingly and slowly started to move towards the bus a quiet voice, but distinctly filled with defiance, spoke up.

'No.'

Everyone, including me, turned around to see who had spoken against the Headmaster. I didn't need to turn around who said so, though. I already knew, since I had heard this voice a lot. And yet, I had never heard the voice of this person with such an... intense feeling behind his voice.

Hiccup was standing with his head bowed, shaking visibly. But there weren't tears or sobs coming out of him anymore. His stance was tense and his small, freckled hands were balled into fists.

Monobear simply tilted his head at the boy. He spoke in a completely carefree tone: 'Huuuh? What do you mean, 'No.'?'

Hiccup spoke up again, this time more loudly than I had ever heard him talk. 'I'm not going to your stupid Field Trip or whatever!'

At this, Monobear stood silently, as if processing what Hiccup was saying. Before the Headmaster could utter a response, Hiccup spoke up again, this time practically shouting.

'Y-you! You did this to Toothless, didn't you?', Hiccup said as he pointed an angry finger at the Headmaster, 'When you said something got in your way and that... that you s-smashed him to bits...! You meant... you meant you did this to him with that stupid bus, didn't you!?''

More silence from the stuffed bear. His vacant stare never left the small Viking as he continued his outburst.

'I'm... NEVER! Going along with someone... who did THIS to my friend! Never!', said Hiccup as he glared at the bear with such an intense hatred that it looked like the green in his eyes were like flames.

After a few seconds, Monobear spoke up in a flat tone. 'Are you done?'

Hiccup merely stood there, dumbfounded at the calm response of the stuffed toy.

Monobear continued. 'So what if I did run over him? That stupid lizard got in my way, so OF COURSE I ran him over with my Super Deluxe School Bus! Really, that overgrown gecko was stupid enough to get in my way, so he got what he deserved! I mean, trying to stop a bus with your own body? Utterly idiotic! Ahahahahahaaa!'

Monobear's taunting laugh and explanation made Hiccup snap. Worried that he would get hurt if he dared to fight the Headmaster, I grabbed him as he ran past me in an attempt to attack the bear.

Man, for being so small, he certainly was strong. Despite how small his arms were, whatever muscle was in there was toned. Despite my surprise, I managed to hold him back in a tight embrace, as he violently struggled and kicked in a desperate attempt to get free and exact his revenge on the monster that had hurt his friend.

Monobear simply smiled at the boy's struggle, and laughed again, before speaking, 'Aww, but that's too bad... you have no say on whether you want to go or not... but if you're being that rude... then I guess I'll just let your overgrown lizard here to die...'

At those words, Hiccup stopped struggling. Holding him back was actually tiring, and though I hated Monobear for what he was doing to my... friend?... I was grateful his taunting had made Hiccup stop.

'...What are you saying?', said Hiccup, his voice still tense and angry.

I swore Monobear's red eye lighted up as he spoke, a malicious tone permeating his words, 'All I'm saying is... your stupid lizard is baaaadly injured... and he doesn't seem like he'll hang on to his life any longer... And y'know, we at Hope's Peak... well, let's just say we're the best at treating student's injuries. But we only do that for kids who behave... and actually follow orders from their smoking hot Headmaster! Do you understand?'

So that's it. He was trying to coax Hiccup with a promise. A promise to heal Toothless.

But why was it so important that we attended this Field Trip, to the point of resorting to bribery and violence? There was obviously an ulterior motive behind this Field Trip, and yet...

We were being forced to participate. This feeling of knowing that something was wrong and yet being unable to do anything about it... it could only be called despair.

As if to drive the point home, Monobear's cheerfully fake voice filled the room once again. 'Not like you really have a choice. You can come with or without your stupid lizard alive. The end result will still be the same! 16 students will attend this Field Trip, whether you like it or not!'

I had enough. I shook Hiccup a bit to get his attention, and the look of sadness he gave me almost broke my heart. He looked absolutely miserable and torn, unsure of what to do. This look, however, motivated me to speak up in an attempt to comfort him.

'Hiccup... you... you should just go...'

Hiccup's sad eyes quickly turned into a glare as he pushed me away and spoke back at me with disbelief. 'Jack...! Are you crazy...? Are you seriously trusting this... this toy?!'

No. No I wasn't. But I knew that losing Toothless would hurt Hiccup more than anything in this world. I didn't want to trust Monobear... but this was the less painful path.

I shook my head as I spoke to the terrified Viking in front of me in a soothing voice. 'Hiccup... I don't trust the bear that much... but I do know this.' I walked towards Hiccup and put my hand on his shoulder, 'I know how much Toothless means to you... and if cooperating with that stuffed toy can save him... then I think it's worth the risk.'

Hiccup looked at me, uncertainty filling his green eyes, before he lowered his gaze and nodded.

It's funny. I have no memories of anything besides my name and age, and yet talking and being with this fishbone of a guy has kept me calm in this weird situation. I am afraid, yet I am not paralyzed by it, just by being around a guy who I've never met. And yet... the same odd feeling of familiarity strikes me as I look at his hair full of messy auburn hair. A feeling of wanting to be close to him, to

protect and comfort him.

Truly, the world was not making any sense anymore. But this was my reality now.

Monobear rudely intruded in that reality by clearing his throat obnoxiously. 'Well, if the lovebirds are done, I'd like to start this Field Trip already! Everyone board the bus. Now.'

L-lovebirds? Of all the comments that Monobear had uttered, this was the one that actually got under my skin?

I noted Hiccup was blushing as he stepped away from me. He looked hesitantly at Toothless before marching towards the bus, which everyone else had already boarded. I made my way towards the bus shortly after, hurrying after him.

Once inside the bus, I looked around for Hiccup. It didn't took me long to find him huddled at the farthest seat in the back, sitting by himself. I walked over there quickly and sat next to him. Hiccup barely acknowledged my presence, understandably full of worry.

Soon, a group of Monobears in nurse and doctor costumes rushed in, carrying Toothless to the back of the bus, upon where they started to treat him, or so I supposed. Hiccup looked at the Monobears working, his gaze never leaving them. He actually jumped back when I put my hand his shoulder in order to reassure him. I offered him a weak smile, doing my best to appear calm. He returned the smile weakly as well, before turning his attention back to the stuffed toys who were moving too fast for us to see what they were actually doing it.

...Damn it! Why can't I find the words needed to calm my friend? I always had a joke at ready to lighten any mood but this time it was different! How infuriating!

Monobear, that is THE Monobear, jumped up to the drivers seat and addressed us all in that cartoony voice of his: 'WELL! It took us some time but we're finally ready to start our very exciting, heart-throbbing Field Trip! And about time too! I was getting sooo bored! So without further ado, let's depart!'

Saying this, the Headmaster plopped down on the drivers seat. But instead of taking the wheel, he pulled a lever next to his seat. In an instant, the bus' door closed and a green gas started to fill the bus.

As everyone panicked and stood up at the sight of the gas, myself included, Monobear's voice rang through the whole vehicle, 'Now, I realize the life of a high school student is filled with stress and worry. So that's why I decided to help you guys! This gas will help you guys get some much needed shut-eye! Puhuhuhu! Aren't I a thoughtful Headmaster?'

And sure enough, the effect was almost instantaneous. My limbs started to lose strength as I flopped back into my seat, my eyes struggling to stay open.

In my last moments of consciousness, I felt the bus move. It gained speed and for some reason it jerked violently in an upwards

direction. However, before I could make any more observations, I succumbed to the gas' effect and fell into a deep slumber.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Is this going to become a thing? Well, wouldn't be a mystery novel if we didn't abuse the 'protagonist falls unconscious' trope.<br>\*\*

\*\*Now for the good news! I have found myself with an ample amount of free time... which means more time to write these chapters which also means chapters will be uploaded at a more steady pace! Neat, no? In fact, expect another chapter either today or tomorrow! And that's all you're gonna get from me today! Cheers!\*\*

\*\*...Just kidding! First, I'd like to thank everyone for their reviews! I'm gonna thank you all directly for that. Much appreciated! Really, it makes me feel confident in my writing, due to English not being my first language. So, really, thank you! Beary much so!\*\*

## 5. 0 - Field Trip of Despair E

\*\*PROLOGUE - ENDGAME 3 - FIELD TRIP OF DESPAIR\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sorry for the delay! I had computer problems and I couldn't upload this chapter in time, ahahaha...<br>\*\*

\*\*Well, nothing can be done about that! I did manage to write a lot of the next chapter while my computer was out of commission, but I'm... going to need your help a little. I'll explain at the end of the chapter. In any case, enjoy!\*\*

\_\_\*\*Hiccup's POV\*\*\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Everything was a mess. Our whole situation was a mess. My mood was a mess.<p>

Toothless was a mess.

At this thought, I woke up in an instant and shot up from my seat, only to smack my forehead against something hard. No better way to wake up, I suppose.

Rubbing my forehead to ease the pain, and biting some tears, I opened my ears and saw the thing I had smacked my head with. Or rather, the idiot I had smacked my head with.

In front of me was Jack, who was also rubbing his forehead and muttering some "ouch"es. Noticing that I was awake, he gave me a sly grin and greeted me: "Morning, sleeping beauty."

I returned a feeble smile. Truth be told, I was grateful for everything Jack had done. This guy really knew how to lighten up the mood. Still, I started to look around for my bud, worry increasing



when I failed to see the mass of black scales I was used to see.

A hand on my shoulder startled, and I turned to see Jack giving me a reassuring smile while his grip on my shoulder got stronger. Huh, guess I really had 'Going crazy from worry' written on my face. Still, I relaxed a bit. Seeing this, Jack spoke.

'If you're looking for Toothless... Monobear took him. He said... that if you wanted to see him, you had to come see Monobear first.' He paused, grimacing a bit before continuing, 'Well, actually, he told us all to come see him, but the last bit was aimed specifically at you.'

Huh... Just what was that stupid toy plotting? His carefree nature didn't fool me, he was a cunning one, that Monobear. Still... I didn't really have a choice... I had to see if Toothless was alright. Sighing at the fact that Monobear had me wrapped around his... paw? ...I stood from my seat, Jack copying my action almost instantly.

'So... where is our beloved Headmaster anyways? For that matter, where ARE we?' I asked Jack, sarcasm obviously dripping from my question as I mentioned the hateful bear.

At this, Jack blushed a bit, and he rubbed the back of his head sheepishly before answering, 'W-well... you see... I haven't actually left the bus... like, at all. I couldn't exactly... you know... just leave! S-so... yeah...'

Seeing Jack stutter actually made me laugh out loud a little, my laughter actually making Jack blush even harder. I understood what he was trying to say. Man, I guess I really worried him, what with me being the last to wake up, apparently.

'Well, no use in staying here...' I said, trying to control the smile in my face as I made my way to exit the bus.

Grateful that I had dropped the subject, Jack's eager smile returned to his face as he literally bounced to catch up to me. 'You're right! Let's get outta here!'

I should have been nervous. Fearful, even. Monobear had Toothless and I was walking towards him, potentially walking into a trap. And yet the teen beside me filled with me with confidence. Perhaps it was because of his attempts at making me race him to the front of the bus? I dunno, but his carefree nature was welcome in this tense situation.

After telling Jack that no, I wasn't going to race him and that no, that pout of his wasn't going to work on me (and like, seriously? You're 17 and you're pouting?) ,we reached the front of the bus, and with a hesitant step, we exited the vehicle.

Of all the things I was expecting to find outside... the thing I was seeing was certainly not within my expectations.

A sea of green exploded in front of me, so many trees clustered together and growing tall and strong, their leaves fluttering softly with the warm breeze that blew through them constantly. We had stepped into a small clearing in this sea of trees, a dirt path

extending in front of us as it led deep into the forest. It was so peaceful and quiet, the blue sky complimenting the atmosphere... Gods, I could even hear a stream somewhere! This place was absolutely amazing!

...Well, except for the alterations done to it, courtesy of the beloved Headmaster.

The bus behind us was the first obvious offender, its screaming yellow color, dilapidated exterior and Monobear motifs on its sides seriously clashing with the natural atmosphere. But that wasn't the thing that caught my attention. Behind the bus stood a giant gate, stretching upwards, easily dwarfing the trees. The gate was made of metal, a complex lock securing it shut, the thickness of the material easily apparent to us; No way we we're going to be able to dent that. As if to make it even more apparent that we weren't going to leave through there, two massive gatling guns were mounted on either side of the gate, along with a security camera. A crude wooden sign that read 'Camp Despair' stood on top of the gate, completing the look.

But that wasn't the only modification Monobear had installed on this forest. Connected to the gate stood an equally as tall and thick metal wall, which extended deep into the forest beyond our sights, making an effective fence. Guns and cameras were also installed sporadically in it. And on top of the wall, spiked wire which visibly carried electricity was installed as well.

Well, if there was ever a way of saying 'You're trapped! Don't even try to escape!', this was it.

Jack shook my shoulder, and I turned around to see what was he pointing at. Nearby the dirt path was another camera installed on a tree, and nearby a monitor was neatly nailed into a neighboring tree.

'Charming', I deadpanned. This bear really had us on constant watch huh? But that monitor... what was it for?

Jack snickered at my comment before he looked at the sky, his mouth agape. I turned my sight towards the sky and let's just say I was more than a little dumbfounded at what I saw.

A massive, needle-like tower rose towards the sky, rising so high it got lost into a thick cluster of clouds.

'What do you think that is, Hic?', said Jack, the wonder in his voice barely contained.

I shook my head, truthfully answering 'I don't know'. Just... what was going on? What was this place? Why did Monobear takes us here and why di- Did Jack just call me Hic?

'Jack... please don't call me Hic...'

'Hey! Friends give each other nicknames! 's all in good fun!

'Oh yeah...? How about I call you-'

'If you're gonna call me Jackass, you're so gonna regret that later,

Hic.'

'Oh really? What'cha gonna do, Jacka-'

'Glad to see you're feeling OK enough to bicker like this.'

I had just finished giving Jack a playful punch in his arm and he was going to grab me in a headlock when our playful bickering got interrupted by a female voice. In front of us stood Astrid, Sandy and Merida, who were eyeing us with a smirk on their faces.

What's up with that look, though?

For some reason, those stares made me a lot more self-conscious than ever before. I felt a blush creep on my face. Why in Thor's name are they smirking at us like that?

Trying to fight this feeling of embarrassment, I spoke up. 'Oh... y-yeah... I've calmed down a little... still worried about Toothless, though...'

At this, Sandy smiled, obviously relieved, but the girls were far more interested at my mention of my bud.

Astrid walked right in front of me, a frown on her face. She looks at me like that for about 4 seconds before a playful grin spreads across her face, followed by a punch to my arm.

I really hope this doesn't become a thing.

'You're just full of surprises, aren't you, Berkian Warrior?', said Astrid.

'Yeah! Never expected to see a dragon in my life!', said Merida, obviously giddy at the thought of a dragon.

'W-well, they aren't exactly common and... w-wait... Berkian Warrior?', I asked, stammering a little.

'It's apparently a Hofferson Tribe tradition', said Merida before Astrid could answer. 'You wouldn't believe how many times she called me 'Dunbranch Warrior' before I asked her to call me by my name.', said Merida, rolling her eyes.

Sandy's sketchbook was displayed towards Astrid, a question written on it: 'Hofferson Tribe tradition?'

Astrid nodded. 'Yeah, we call any fellow warriors by a title instead of their name, out of respect. Unless we're asked by the warrior itself, we won't use their first name.'

'You didn't call me Overland Warrior when we talked, though...' said Jack with a questioning tone.

Astrid smiled mischievously, 'Well, that's because you obviously aren't a warrior'.

'Great, somehow a fishbone and a girl are more warrior-like than me...' said Jack in a fake hurtful tone, obviously acting self-depreciative in order to make us laugh. Which we did, Sandy even

writing a 'Hahahaha' on his sketchbook, which only intensified our laughter.

'Well, you can call me Hiccup, Astrid. I don't really mind... plus, Berkian Warrior sounds too mighty for me...', I said, after catching my breath. Astrid nodded without talking, still laughing. She really didn't look like a warrior while laughing.

'I dunno Hic... talking to dragons is pretty mighty if you ask me.' said Jack while he poked me in the ribs with his finger. I slapped his hand away in annoyance, both at that nickname and the gesture. Being ticklish was not something I wanted to let Jack know. Gods, who knows what he would do with that information...

Of course, that little comment of his intrigued the three teens before us, but before they could start bombarding me with questions, I asked them: 'Have... any of you seen Monobear...?'

At this, the group stiffened. Sandy nodded slowly, while Merida spoke up: 'Yeah... he... actually sent us to pick you guys up. He said he was tired of waiting and he said he needed us all in the Camp Square for a special announcement...'

At this, Jack and I exchanged a look. This... feeling of dread... wasn't only mine, it seemed. But I had to go, for Toothless... no matter what.

'Come on, we'll show you the way. We came from there after all.', says Astrid with a cold, restrained voice, as she leads us down the dirt path. As we walk down that road, a Monobear-shaped post sign that reads 'Camp Square' can be seen, the sign pointing down the dirt path. Among the many trees that surround us, I can make out more cameras and monitors.

No one really talks as we make our way through the forest, the atmosphere too tense with anticipation. Even Jack is oddly silent, not making any cracks or comments. He does, however, sporadically turn to see me, a look of worry in his eyes.

Gods, really? Why did I have to blush at that gesture? Am I really that starved for attention that the most simple act of kindness made me turn red? Pathetic.

Finally, after some more awkward minutes of walking in silence, we exit the forest into a big clearing. It is devoid of grass and any natural things, not even a rock or pebble in sight. The only distinctive landmarks in this barren, sad circle of dirt is a flagpole in the middle of it, the Hope's Peak Academy flag perched on it, flapping in the wind. A lone speech booth sits at the base of the flagpole, empty and devoid of bears.

Strange. Didn't Monobear say that he was going to tell them something important? If so, where was he?

As I walked towards the flagpole, I noticed the rest of the student huddled in front of the booth. To my surprise, almost all of them surrounded me, obviously worried about me. I was taken aback. I mean... I thought for sure they'd be scared of me because of Toothless but... they actually worried about me. To say I was touched by this would be an understatement. If I weren't such a tough Viking,

I would probably have cried a little bit right there.

Well, not everyone was happy to see me, truth be told. Elsa was still looking coldly at me and Anna, apparently mad that her sister was near me.

Then, I was shoved hard into the ground by someone. Before I could register who had done so, I heard a snotty laugh and that's all I needed to hear to know that my #1 fan, Snotlout had done so.

'Looks like the sleeping crybaby finally woke up from its nap!', said the beefy guy, a jeer on his face.

'Nice to see you again, Snotlout', I said, sarcasm obvious in my tone as Jack helped me get up. I caught a glimpse of his face and boy, his eyes practically screamed murder.

Before he or I could do anything, Astrid beat us the punch, literally. The blonde warrior uppercutted the brute so fast he didn't see it coming.

'I like her already', whispered Jack to me, smiling. I silently nodded, also smiling, while I dusted myself off.

Snotlout is rubbing his jaw while laying on the floor, still dazed, before shooting an angry glare at Astrid. 'What was that for?!', he asks angrily.

Astrid smirks before answering, 'Sorry, its just that I have a natural urge to punch jerks and idiots'. Jack, the twins and Flynn erupt into laughter, and even I have to hold back some chortles. Snotlout gets up, face red from embarrassment, and distances himself from the group.

'Thanks, Astrid.'

'Don't worry about it, Hiccup.', she says dismissing my thanks. 'I wasn't lying when I said that.'

I frown a little at that. 'But... you already punched me in the arm like, twice.'

A silence envelops us all before everyone starts laughing at my comment, even the calm and collected Peter chuckling a little. I could swear even Elsa was fighting the urge to smile.

Suddenly, I feel someone recline on me, their arm around my neck. Jack is just barely hanging onto me, doubled in laughter. 'Oh man... Hiccup...! You're a riot!', he says between laughs, his face lit up with happiness and joy.

Gods, I really liked seeing him so happy.

'No, Jack. I'm not a riot. I think we just established I was a jerk and an idiot.' I say, waiting for his reaction. I didn't have to wait long. Everyone started laughing again, and Jack is on the floor, rolling with laughter.

This moment of peace, of laughter and fun... We were in a strange place but unknowingly, we had started to feel comfortable again.

Enjoying each other's company.

Of course, HE wouldn't let us have this moment. Not a chance.

A sound of static fills the air, and a shriek snaps us out of our joyful moment.

'Aah! Aah! Mic test! Mic test! Can you hear me?', the all-too familiar voice asks before continuing, 'Ah, whatever~ Let's just start this thing!'.

You could cut the tension in the atmosphere with a knife. That warm, fun moment was destroyed simply by the voice of the weird toy bear that called himself the Headmaster.

And sure enough, the Headmaster himself appeared shortly after jumping comically into the speech booth. Sitting there, motionless, the bear looked harmless.

But I wasn't fooled by that facade. This toy was a monster. A monster that had hurt my friend willingly. I had to hold back my anger, lest I do something stupid and reckless.

I really wanted to do something stupid and reckless.

Monobear takes a look at all of us before speaking in a worried tone. 'Awww, why so moody guys? Relax! I may be a beary strict Headmaster but I do allow fun, you know? After all, the whole purpose behind this field trip is to make you guys have fun!'

'Really?' Tooth asked warily.

'Then why did you knock us out with sleeping gas?' said Fishlegs, adding his question to the pile.

'And the gates, fences, surveillance cameras and guns... not exactly my definition of fun here, yes?', finished North.

Monobear cocked his head to the left, his white paw coming ear his mouth, as if he was confused by all these questions. 'Huhhh? I thought I had explained this to you guys already! Don't make me repeat myself, I hate that! Don't make me repeat myself, I hate that! ...Oops!' Monobear blushed, the embarrassment at his blunder almost believable.

Almost.

Snotlout, who had been silent up until now, shouted at the bear, 'Just tell us why the fuck you did all of that!'

Monobear looked at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter with an amused grin, 'Puhuhu! Looks like Mr. Jerk-and-idiot lives up to his name! You aren't very smart are you?'. I can hear Tuff and Ruff snickering. Guess today was Pick on Snotlout Day, not that I minded.

'Fine! I'll repeat for you guys one more time! This Field Trip's main purpose is to give the new students of Hope's Peak a fun and relaxing experience, away from the stress of families, classes, homework and enemy Stands, while also keeping them safe from threats from the dangerous outside world with our top notch security!', said Monobear

in an almost robotic tone, as if he were reading this from a pamphlet and he had rehearsed the whole thing a million times.

'You guys have nothing to worry about. The installations in our beautiful Camp Despair are top notch! Here, you'll interact with nature but without having to struggle with it! You'll basically be fed, have your own cottage for you with all the needs for a comfortable stay and our delightful Monobear staff will take care of you!', said Monobear, a giggle escaping his snout.

From the corner of my eyes I could see Aster making a disgusted expression. I guess the Ultimate Survivalist didn't like the fact that they were going to be comfortable among nature. As for me? I may be a rough Viking but a private cottage with running water and electricity was too hard to pass up.

Still... all of this was sounding so good... I had to remind me that this was the bear that almost killed Toothless. There had to be a catch.

'So yeah! That's basically our goal at Camp Despair! To give you guys a nice time, away from the outside world... forget all the worries on your life for the duration of this Field Trip... Ah! That's right! How long will this Field Trip last, you may ask?'

Monobear paused, and a sense of dread filled me. I really hoped my gut feeling was wrong... but that hope was destroyed when the Headmaster spoke.

'Well... this Field Trip's duration is set to... a no-time-lim rule! A life time of fun and peace! In other words... you are not to leave this fun camp of fun ever, never ever! Isn't that great? Ahahaha!'

Oh...

Wait, WHAT?

Of course, the group exploded with outrage.

'You can't be serious...' mouthed Tooth, disbelief coating her words.

'Staying here... forever might be... quite bothersome', said Peter, trying to keep an even voice despite the look of worry in his face.

'Yeah! What's the big idea?!', shouted Flynn, 'Are you kidnapping us?!'

'How rude! I have no idea what you're talking about... I'm just trying to give you guys some fun times and you just gell at me...' said Monobear crestfallen.

'W-well.. we can't just stay here! What about school? We haven't even started...' said Rapunzel.

'What about our families? Our friends?' said Anna, her hand gripping Elsa's visibly.

'Juuuust forget about those! Leave all that stress behind and adapt to your new home! You'll find this communal life style... beary fetching! Ahahaha!', said Monobear, waving off all the worries of everyone.

I didn't voice mine, but of course I was worried. Sure, there wasn't much for me back at Berk but I was one of the only people who could deal with the dragons and... I still loved my Dad, self-esteem issues notwithstanding.

Staying here forever, no matter how comfortable, was not something I wanted.

For some reason, I thought of Jack. I glanced at him and my worries were confirmed. The guy's face was stiff, his eyes wide and staring at nothing. Of course Jack was taking this very harshly. He had no memories of his life outside of this whole situation and now the Headmaster was telling them he couldn't leave this place, denying him the chance of learning more about himself. I didn't like the anguish on his face and I tried to comfort him like he did all those times but my hand wouldn't move.

Why did I have to be so awkward at times like this?  
Gods...

'Buuuut...', Monobear's voice snapped me out of my self-depreciative tirade, 'if you guys really, REALLY, want to leave... there is one way...'

At this, everyone fixed their gaze on Monobear, Jack even snapping at him 'What way?!' at the stuffed menace with a sense of urgency in his voice.

At this, Monobear's red eye lighted up maliciously. 'It's very simple, really... the only way for a student to leave this place is by killing another student!', said the Headmaster, his tone of voice cheery and completely at odds with what he was saying.

...Huh?

'Yo-you... can't be serious...', I said, refusing to believe what he was saying. But the look on Monobear's face and what he had done to Toothless told me all what I needed to know. He was serious about this.

'Oy... this ain't funny mate...', said Aster, his eyes wide. He was fidgeting in place.

'Y-yeah... cut it out man... you can't joke about this type of stuff...', said Flynn, looking around nervously.

Monobear tilted his head in confusion, again. 'Buh-wha? Who says I'm joking? I'm very serious about it!'

'Stop fucking around!', shouted Snotlout, panick setting on his voice, 'You kidnap us and then you tell us we can't leave unless we kill each other? That's messed up!'

'He's r-right', said Ruffnut, 'Th-this has got to be a joke, right?



After all, there's no way you're gonna force us to do this... right?'

'Yeah... destroying things is one thing... but us? Destroying people? Not possible.', supplemented Tuffnut.

'And why is it not possible?', asked Monobear, 'You guys kill each other ALL the time for the most petty things. Really, you guys need to drop those cultural preconceptions and face reality. And its not like I'm forcing your hand! I'm giving you a choice!'

Monobear jumped down from the speech booth and walked towards as he talked. 'Either you guys learn to cut your ties from the outside world and live here in peace for the rest of your lives, or you kill someone here to return to the outside world! Simple!'

No... this was not simple at all.

'As for killing... I really don't mind how you guys do it! Stabbingshootingstranglingpoisoningdrowningexplodingburningelectrocuting... whatever method you guys pick is fine by me! Peaceful days and brutal murders! That's the gist of this heart-throbbing Field Trip of Mutual Killing! Puhuhuhu! Aren't you excited?'

How can YOU be excited about this?! What is wrong with you?! 'How can you... even be excited!? You're basically urging us to murder! What kind of Headmaster are you?!' I shouted at Monobear.

'I'm the best Headmaster in the world, thank you beary much!', said Monobear with a grin on his face. 'Yknow... Hiccy... you shouldn't be saying things like that... people like you are the first to go in these kinds of stories!'

I felt faint, the realization that this bear was being serious hitting me fully. I feel a strong hand on my shoulder, gripping me strongly, and when I look to see who was grabbing me, I gasp at Jack's face, which is full of anger as he stares daggers at the Headmaster.

'Puhuhuh! Looks like you're making allies already! Guess you're going to survive enough to reunite with your stupid lizard!'

At this, I feel a surge of anger. 'Where is he? Where is Toothless?! What did you do hi-?'

My angry outburst is interrupted by pain. I feel a searing pain in my chin. I touch it, feeling a warm liquid on my fingers, the unmistakable smell of blood reaching my nose. I look at Monobear, who's shaking his black paw in order to get the blood out of his claws. He turns to me, a malicious tone in his voice.

'Man, you need to learn when to shut up. I said I was gonna cure him, alright? I play by the rules and promises I make. I was known by my honest streak back at the zoo! So, shut up already about your stupid lizard. It's getting old'.

'Like I said, I hate repeating myself. Don't defy me, disrespect me or insult me. You are to obey me. Understood? I don't want to make an example of you guys... don't wanna see me go bearserk.'

As I put a hand on the cut Monobear had given me to stop the trickle of blood, I hear a small, female voice. I'm surprised to see it's Elsa, her cold tone reduced to a shrill whisper.

'Why... why are you doing all of this...? What do you have to gain... from imprisoning us... and urging us to kill each other?'

At this Monobear, walks away from us, back to the speech booth. 'My motivation, you ask? You guys are so predictable.' He jumps onto the speech booth, before smiling a wicked, deranged grin, one that should be impossible for a toy to show. 'I guess... you could say my motivation is... your despair.'

A dead silence creeps on all of us as we try to make sense of the Headmaster's words.

'The 16 Ultimates... the ones who represent the Hope of the world, the very best there is... the ones who carry the bright future of the world in their shoulders... can you imagine how awful it will be when these supposed beacons of hope start to kill each other? I bet the harrowing despair that will result from that will be beautiful... Puhuhu!'

We just stood there, dumbfounded at the words coming out of the Headmaster, trying to make sense of his discourse. But there was no making sense out of the pure madness that were the Headmaster's words.

I was expecting ransom for our kidnapping, money being his motivation, but this? Doing this simply because he wanted to see us despair...? I couldn't make anything out of it. I couldn't even voice my confusion.

No one could.

No one was protesting. Nor questioning Monobear anymore. Was it because we had realized we were dealing with a madman, someone who relished torturing kids with a mechanical toy bear? The silence stretched for a long time, before Monobear spoke up again.

'Well, I'm getting bored, so let's finish this announcement already', he said as he pulled out a box from behind him. 'In here I have something very important for your everyday lives!', In his paw I can see a bunch of blue-card like devices, 'Introducing... the ElectroID!'

'The ElectroID is a very important device! This nifty little thing has info on you and is absolutely vital if you wanna enjoy a peaceful life here! This thing is your key to your cottage! If you lose it, you won't be able to get inside, so take care of it! It also has a map of the Camp! I couldn't bear it if you got lost...'

'Finally, but not least important, the ElectroID has the rules for this Field Trip of Mutual Killing! I recommend you read them as soon as you can! Breaking the rules will result in punishment, and ignorance of the rules is no excuse! Take this to heart, you bastards. I don't have compassion, sympathy or pity. That's because I'm a bear.'

As he said all of that, he walked around us handing us our

ElectroIDs, before heading back to the speech booth.

'Now then... Let's start this Field Trip of Mutual Killing and make it as memorable as we can! Ahahahahahahaa!'

And with that ugly laugh, he disappeared.

Everyone looked around, nervously staring at each other, trying to lighten the mood or do anything to break the grim atmosphere. But not even Jack, the most fun person I knew, was trying to cheer us up, his face tight with worry and the grip on his ElectroID and my shoulder firm. I was probably going to get a bruise from that but I felt somewhat safer with his hand there.

Finally, Rapunzel spoke up, an awkward smile on her face, 'Hey... cheer up guys... there's no way he's... being serious, right?'

'The problem is not... whether he was being truthful or not...' said Peter, his lips pressed tightly while he spoke, 'The problem is... who actually believes the Headmaster enough... to do what he has asked us to do.'

And at that, I realized the worst thing about this situation. The worst thing wasn't being trapped, away from everyone. The worst thing was the feeling of distrust that was growing between us.

Because really, in the end, we were all strangers. Strangers we couldn't, cannot, trust with our lives. Because any of us could kill any of us, simply out of fear of being killed, without any remorse.

All previous laughs and feelings of comradeship that we had shared were torn apart by Monobear's decree, leaving behind an empty feeling of distrust, of cold glares, of emotionless masks and gazes.

And it was in this hurricane of distrust that our school year started. It didn't start with a day of classes, friends and Hope. It started with fear, enemies, a field trip and Despair.

**\*\*PROLOGUE - FIELD TRIP OF DESPAIR\*\***

**\*\*END\*\***

**\*\*STUDENTS STILL ALIVE: 16\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p><strong>Alright then! Now we're entering the meat of this despair-ridden story, but before we move on, I am going to ask for your help in a little experiment.<strong>

**\*\*Those familiar with the Danganronpa series will know that you can interact with the characters in the stories to get to know them better in a period known as "Free Time". I want to implement that here as well, but I also want to extend the experience towards you. So, I'm going to ask you guys which character you want Hiccup to interact with! Here's how its going to go down.\*\***

**\*\*Basically, you guys will send me a PM with your top three characters you want to get to know more. The characters with most**

votes will be featured in the story. \*\*

\*\*You can post votes in the reviews even if you have an account but ONLY if you do so while writing me an actual review. I will not count posts that are only votes. I want reviews, not fluff.\*\*

\*\*Also, you can't vote for Jack. Jack is already going to be the one who interacts with Hiccup the most and this story is Hijack so.

><strong>

\*\*That's all there's to it! Just vote, vote vote! \*\*

\*\*And for those worried, this won't affect the story that much. The direction of the story is already decided, this will only affect which characters you guys get to meet.\*\*

\*\*So, I guess I'll see you around on Thursday or so... Monodoof out!\*\*

## 6. 1 - Chapter 1 - Normal Lives A

\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sorry for the delay, guys! Family matters got in the way, but here's the next chapter! We are leaving the Prologue behind and we will finally start the TRUE Chapter 1. Let's get excited!<strong>

\*\*Just so you guys know, this story will consist of 6 Chapters (Think of them as story arcs), but the number of chapters will be far more than 6 (I mean, the Prologue took 5 Fanfic Chapters and over 10K words oops)\*\*

\*\*So, sit back. Relax. And enjoy?\*\*

\*\*Also, I'm sorry, but there's no Free Time events on this chapter. I feared it was getting too long so they will be saved for the next chapter. Still, keep voting!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><span><em><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>\_

A low hum fills the air as I turn on my ElectroID, which flashes up with a blue light. Hope's Peak Academy's logo flashes briefly in the screen before it fades, a picture of my face and text that reads 'ElectroID belonging to Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III' replacing it, along with data of me... info on me so detailed I wondered how Monobear got it... seriously...? Weight and height are OK, but bust size? Why would anyone want to know that?

I put my finger on the screen of the ElectroID, which reacts at the touch and replaces my profile on the screen with a Main Menu, or so it says on the top of the screen. I touch the 'Rules' option and they're displayed instantly.

**\*\*RULES FOR THE FIELD TRIP OF MUTUAL KILLING\*\***

**\*\*You are not allowed to harm the Headmaster. The Headmaster won't hurt you unless you do so first.\*\***

**\*\*You are not allowed to destroy the surveillance cameras.\*\***

**\*\*You can explore and wander around the allowed areas marked on your map as much as you want. Trying to break into non-permitted areas will earn you a punishment.\*\***

**\*\*You can only sleep in the cottages. Sleeping anywhere else is prohibited.\*\***

**\*\*During your stay here, the days will be divided into two periods: Day Time and Night Time. Night Time starts at 10 PM and ends at 7 AM. During Night Time, some parts of the Camp will become inaccessible, so please keep this in mind.\*\***

**\*\*A student can only leave when he kills another student.\*\***

**\*\*More rules will be added at the Headmaster's discretion. Please, let's give it our best every day!\*\***

With a sigh, I dropped the ElectroID on my chest as I lay on my own bed. Typical of Monobear to shoehorn a cheery spin on a dreadful thing. But if there was one thing about him that I had learned so far, it was that he wasn't a liar.

After he gave us our ElectroIDs, we all dispersed to our cottages. They were in the Lodging Area, north of the clearing where Monobear had given us his despair-inducing speech. There, we found our assigned cottages and using our ElectroIDs like Monobear told us to, we entered them, not saying a word to each other.

The cottages weren't so bad, even though they had a wooden exterior. Or at least I thought so. There was a simple desk and a chair with a lamp on the right corner, and a bed sitting opposite of it. A window with blinds on the back wall was the only source of natural lighting, but as Monobear had said, there was a functioning light bulb in case I ever needed light during the night. The cottage even possessed a bathroom with a shower installed. To top it all off, there even was an A/C unit in the room. It would have been perfect if there wasn't a camera and a monitor here... but at least Monobear had the decency of not putting a camera on the bathroom. Despite all of this, I couldn't ignore my situation.

I had been laying on my bed for hours. To say that I wasn't upset would've been a lie. This situation and Toothless' current state... just was too much, you know? I screamed in frustration and anger and fear, using a pillow to muffle my screams, until my throat started hurting. So much for Ultimate Luck being my talent... I had landed myself in the worst of situations and there was no way out of this.

Well, there was a way, but I... I would never kill. Warriors in Berk are supposed to do so when fighting others but I... I just can't. I've never wanted to hurt anyone, much less kill. I... just... am too weak. If any of the others ever decided to kill, I bet I would be the first one to go.

A buzz coming from the previously turned off monitor broke my train of thought. An image of Monobear sitting on a throne while he drank a glass of lemonade appeared on it. He was inside a room I didn't recognize. 'Um... its now Night Time! Please have pleasant dreams... and don't let the murderers get you! Puhuhuhu!', and with that announcement the monitor turned off.

'Gee, thanks for that', I said to no one in particular. I was bitter and tired, but I just couldn't fall asleep. I was worried about... well, everything! What was I going to do? Lock myself here? I doubted I would last without food... since there was none in this cottage to begin with. Plus, I would surely go mad of boredom. Should I risk it and just go out tomorrow?

To think that this was my reality now... that my old, boring days of my ordinary life were gone... would I even be able to adapt? Or would I be someone's ticket out of this place?

For some reason, Jack's face flashed in my mind at that thought. Gods, what an odd thought to have...

'I guess... he escaping because of me... would be alright with me...', I muttered without thinking.

After thinking and thinking and more thinking about it but not getting anything out of all that, I fell asleep.

\_\*\*Jack's POV.\*\*\_

A buzz interrupts my troubled sleep, and I immediately groan at the familiar sound. Sure enough, from the monitor inside my cottage, Monobear's voice rings out 'Gooooood morning everyone! It is now 7 AM! Let us give it our all on this beauuuutiful day!'.

I don't even bother looking at the monitor, not particularly eager to see the face of our captor. I was sure I would've broken something if I had seen his mug.

This whole situation was... to put it lightly, pretty shitty.

Losing my memories was one thing, but being held against my will here and being urged to kill to leave? I don't know what Monobear's definition of fun was, but it was vastly different from my own.

Sighing, I picked up my ElectroID once more, hoping for answers about myself. Once again, I was greeted by a picture of my own face, my name, age... and nothing else. Even my talent was blank, simply displaying 'Ultimate ?'. I bet the Headmaster was getting a laugh out of this.

'...What am I going to do...?', I spoke to no one, as if I were expecting answers. When none came, as expected, I moved to a sitting position and rested on the edge of my bed.

I didn't want to stay here forever, at all. But killing? No way I was ever gonna do that. Even if I was a murderer when I had my memories, the current me wasn't comfortable with that. So... what should I do? Just live here forever, never knowing the truth about

myself...?

Inadvertently, my thoughts turned to Hiccup.

I was unsure before, but now... I can almost definitely say I've met him before. No memories have returned to me yet, but I just... feel more comfortable around him. Like I can be myself without being judged. I'm sure that he... is very important to the mystery that is me. That he is important to me. I must stay close to him.

Protect him, even. I don't... want to lose him.

But why don't I want to lose him? Sure, he's my only lead and yet... something else motivates my resolve of protecting him... I guess it's just because he's a cool kid? Sarcasm and awkwardness notwithstanding, he feels like a real friend. Is he an old friend of mine, perhaps? But why doesn't he recognize me, then...?

'Aaagh! This sucks!', I groan, exasperated at the questions that just keep piling up, and I let myself fall back into my bed as I rub my hair in frustration.

So, that's all there is to it, huh...? Stay close to Hic and survive? Guess that's the only thing I can manage to do for now...

A loud knock on my door snaps me out of my thoughts, along with a 'Jack, are you up and awake?'. I would recognize that voice anywhere. Jumping off from my bed, barefooted as I liked it, I opened the door to see North's beaming face, who still was rocking a red Christmas sweater, brown dress pants and shoes. North had a round face and long, brown hair tied on a ponytail, a visible stubble on his chin. He was also very large... I wouldn't be surprised if he actually wrestled bears as a side hobby. However, despite all this, North was a very affectionate man, though he spoke strongly and without stuttering. And he enjoyed my jokes, always giving a hearty laugh. I felt I could trust this guy as a leader.

...Of course, with everything that happened yesterday... should I really trust this guy? I liked him but...

'Hello? Earth to Jack? Are you there?', he said playfully, knocking on my head as if it were empty. I buckled a little under his big hand but I laughed in response. Ah, what the heck! I'll take my chances!

'Jackson Overland, reporting for duty!' I said, doing a mock saluting gesture before reclining on the doorframe, 'So, what's up Nick? Anything you need?'

North rolled his eyes at my new nickname (What? It was brilliant!), but he smiled once again, 'Ah, yes! I do have big favor to ask! Or rather... invitation for you!', he paused before asking me, 'I assume you're hungry right now, no? How about joining me and the others for big breakfast!'

Well, I am pretty hungry right now... but eating with the others? So soon, after Monobear's announcement? Would that be wise?

A large pat on my back brought me back to the present, along with Nick's booming laugh. 'C'mon Jack! It'll be fine and fun! And safe! I

doubt people will try anything on a place so crowded! So please?'

Nick's nonchalant optimism aside, his logic made sense and my stomach was growling...

'Alright, alright! You don't have to beg! The fabulous Jack will attend your breakfast!', I said, bowing with a smile.

'Most excellent!', shouted Nick happily, hugging me almost to the after life, 'Well, got to go! Still need to wake some more people!'

After making sure I was still alive by catching my breath, my mind wandered to Hiccup. An idea sprung into my mind.

'Hey, Nick! Mind if I help ya with that? I'll wake my neighbor so you don't have to!', I suggested, pointing to the cottage to the right of mine.

Nick nodded with appreciation, before leaving.

Crap, I had forgotten to ask where we were going to meet. Ah well, if I needed any info, I could always consult my ElectroID. That's how I learned that my neighbor was a certain freckled fishbone. What are the odds, right?

Still barefooted, I headed towards the little Viking's cottage with a smile on my face. Kinda funny how my plan of staying close to Hiccup overlapped with Nick's plan, but I couldn't complain.

I knocked on Hiccup's door perhaps a little bit too strongly, excited to see him.

\*\*Hiccup's POV\*\*

Monobear's announcement had awakened me, and a few tears formed in my eyes when I remembered it was Toothless who used to wake me up for a morning flight. But I wouldn't cry anymore. I wouldn't want to give Monobear the satisfaction of crying anymore. I had to prove I was a strong Viking worth my salt.

A loud knock on my door made me let out a scream that no Viking worth it's salt would ever let out.

W-who was it? W-was this it? W-was I going to die right now? I didn't even last two days and-

'Heeeeeey! Hic? You awake?'

I rolled my eye and let out a sigh. It was only Jack. And his let's-give-stupid-nicknames-to-people-for-no-reason tendencies.

Putting on my sneakers and stretching, I walked towards my door, where the white-haired idiot was composing a melody of knocks and bangs. As I opened the door, I was taken by surprise when Jack's tall and gangly frame fell on me, almost dragging me to the floor.

'Hic, you took soooo long, I'm feeling faint from hunger already', he



whined as he clung to me.

'Get off me, you doofus! You're heavy...!' I said, trying my best to remove this ridiculous teenager off from me, but he only clung on harder the more I tried to get him off me.

'Maaan, I'm so hungry I can't keep fighting against gravity... its increasing with each passing moment!', Jack lamented as he pulled me to the ground even more.

'Jack...! T-that doesn't even make any sense...!', OK, this was bad... I couldn't keep holding him up..!

'No, it's totally true! This happened to me once!'

'Jack, I swear to Thor I'm gon-'. Yep, this is as far as my strength go. Hello Mr. Floor, nice to meet you again. Have you met the cackling idiot on top of me? His name is Jack.

The laughing whitette climbed off from me and flicked away a tear incurred from all the laughing he was doing. 'Oh, man, Hic! Your face was priceless!' he said as he offered me a hand in order for me to stand up.

I took his hand with a bit of disdain and he pulled me up without trying too hard. Not that it was an amazing feat or anything, since I'm... a fishbone... but anyways! I glared at him, not really appreciating his sense of humor so early in the morning... OK he made me loosen up a bit but still...!

'What do you want, Jack?', I deadpanned.

'Geez, no need to be so cold!', he said as he put up his hands, 'I just thought that the Mighty Viking was hungry so I decided to take him out for breakfast! Wanna come?'

Oh. Well, I am kinda famished... but first...

'Huh? Mighty Viking?', I said as I looked around my cottage before turning back to him with a sly grin on my face, 'Are you sure you got the right cottage? Perhaps you should try the one next door...' I said as I closed the door on Jack's shocked face.

Jack's frantic knocks came soon, as I had expected. Time to get back at him!

'Hey, Hic! This isn't funny!'

'I beg to differ.'

'C'mon Hic, I'm serious!'

'I find THAT hard to believe.'

'Can you stop with the sass and come out already?!'

'T-the number you've dialed is out of service, please try again later.' I said, stifling a laughter.

'OK, look', I heard Jack sigh exasperatedly, 'I'm sorry I-'

'Nearly crushed me with your giant butt? Can't believe that's how the first murder would go down. Viking gets crushed to death by teenager's butt!'

'Hiccup! I'm trying to apologize here! Please, forgive me?'

OK, I had my fun. With that, I opened my door, a grin on my face. A grin that disappeared when I saw Jack's stern face. Perhaps I overdid it a bit?

'So... uh... how about that breakfast...?' I started, shuffling nervously in place before Jack's firm hand on my shoulder grabbed my attention.

'Uh... Jack?', I prodded as he stared at me with those blue eyes of his, unmoving.

'Hiccup, don't ever joke about that', and I was startled to hear such a serious tone leaving Jack's mouth. He really was bothered about this. He continued as he stared at me, 'I'll never murder anyone... much less you. Nor I'll let anyone harm you, OK? You're my friend after all.'

I nodded. The time for teasing was over, it seemed. Still... being called a friend by someone else... really made me happy. My first human friend... I fought the smile creeping on my face, without much success.

Jack let me go, smiling, before taking out his ElectroID. 'Right, breakfast! It should be around here somewhere...' he said as he fiddled with the device before shouting excitedly, 'Aha! Here it is!' He pushed his ID at me, the map of the camp highlighting a building with a fork and knife symbol on it.

'Huh... so, we have to go to the Rec Area...' I said, taking out my own ElectroID and looking at the map.

Jack nodded, 'Yep! It's to the east of this area, so c'mon! Let's go!', and with that he leapt forward, eager to go.

I shook my head while chuckling. Jack was indeed something else. I pocketed my ElectroID and followed Jack as we walked towards the Rec Area. Yesterday's events made me oblivious to the Lodging Area where we were staying but now that I was calm, I started to take it in.

It wasn't that special, honestly. It was just another circular clearing with trees surrounding us, with the cottages arranged in a circle. There was something noteworthy, though, and that was the fountain installed in the center of the area. As we passed it, I could see a sign that read 'Fountain of Hope'.

I rolled my eyes mentally. Was this more Monobear-brand irony?

Aside from that, there wasn't much to note. A post sign with boards that read 'Rec Area' (This one pointed west) and Meeting Spot (This one pointed south) stood near the fountain... and aside from that there's nothing else of note but the occasional camera mounted on some cottages and of course the monitors.

Well, aside from the view of the needle-like tower. From this place, it looks closer and truly enormous, the top of it still obscured by a thicket of clouds. Just... what is that place?

As we enter the Rec Area, I force my eyes off the tower (which is apparently visible from everywhere on the camp) in order to see this new location.

...OK, this place definitely didn't belong with the whole Camp and Nature aesthetic.

I mean, a supermarket and a fast food joint definitely don't belong on a camp... a-and is that a hospital and a laundromat!? Gods, the only thing that belongs in this place is the cottage with the 'Lounge' sign, but still!

'Looks like Monobear went all out...', says Jack next to me, obviously awestruck at the unusual sights.

'Someone please get the Headmaster an exterior decoration expert...' I say as I see the neon lighted sign of the fast food joint, which reads 'McMonobears'. 'And a lawyer, because I'm sure that's copyright infringement', I finish.

Jack laughs at my comment before he tugs my arm as he walks towards the restaurant. I guess this is the place, huh?

After horsing around a little more, we enter the establishment, Jack not shutting up about he totally beat me at a race I wasn't even trying to win. I was going to shoot him a sarcastic remark before I froze at the sight of the people inside.

All the 16 Ultimates, reunited. And tense. Or was it just me? Because I definitely am pretty tense.

'Ah! Jack, Hiccup! Nice to see you made it!', says North as he stands up to greet us.

Eager to look at anything but the students looking at us, I take in my surroundings. The restaurant looks pretty much like a regular McDonald's but with,,, a 70s twist to it and of course, some Monobear motifs sprinkled here and there. There's even a Monobear Jukebox near the tables but I'm not eager to learn about the Headmaster's musical taste.

North's voice pulls my attention as he shouts, 'Well! Now that everyone is here, let's order up and start with the eating!'

Slowly, everyone gets up from their tables and walk away towards the register where a Monobear in uniform sits, ready to take our orders. Strangely, this Monobear doesn't talk or taunt us, it just stays there taking our orders. It is at that moment that I realize something important.

'Uh, Jack... I don't have any money on me...', I say as I turn to look at him nervously.

'Ya don't hav'ta worry about that, Hiccup!', says a familiar voice behind us. Merida, Sandy and Astrid are there, an uneasy smile on their faces. I guess they're still trying to be friendly to us

despite the circumstances...

'What do you mean, Mer?', Jack asks, giving another hapless victim an unwanted nickname.

Merida glares at Jack, seemingly resisting the urge to punch Jack because of the nickname, but instead answers the question, 'According to Monobear, the food here is free... well, everything here is...'

At that, I stand shocked. 'Monobear was here?'

At my question, Sandy shows us a very detailed sketch of Monobear standing on table, surrounded by 14 students, us missing.

'Yeah, he appeared before all of us and told us everything here is up for grabs if we needed it... which is surprisingly nice...' says Astrid, supplementing Sandy's sketch.

I had to agree. So far, nothing dangerous or unfair (aside from the whole kidnapping-and-not-leaving-until-we-kill-each-other deal) had happened. Instead, Monobear had been fairly accommodating...

'I guess he really meant it when he said we were going to live a life without stress here...' I mumble.

Of course, if he really meant everything he said, he really expects us to kill each other.

I don't voice that observation as we reach the front of the register and order our food. As we return to the tables I notice a lot of them have been arranged in order to form a long rectangle. North sees me looking at the table and he grins before shouting, 'Is for all of us to eat together!'

I nod in understanding as I walk to the farthest seat of everyone, trying to stay away from Elsa and Snotlout, who are the only people who seem to hate my guts. Next to Elsa, Anna waves at me and flashes a smile, but before I can return it, the aftermentioned Ice Queen grabs her hand pushes it down, and turns to glare at me.

Yeah, definitely still hates me.

Thankfully, Jack, Astrid, Sandy and Merida sit around me. At least these people like me. As we wait for our food, we make idle chatter, and as we try to keep Jack and Merida from trying to race each other, North suddenly stands up and claps his hand, calling attention to himself. Tooth stands next to him, a nervous smile on her face.

'Attention everyone! I'd like to commence the first meeting to discuss our situation!', he shouts and pauses as he waits for our reaction.

Aster is the first one to speak up. 'Alrigh', I'll bite. What's this about, North?' he queries as he crosses his arms.

'Ugh, we have to discuss things AGAIN?' groans Tuff.

'While we're still alive?' Ruff says.

North clears his throat in order to shut the twins up, 'Yes, well... is true we already talked among ourselves about our situation, but...! That was before and this is now!'

'What North is trying to say' interjects Tooth, 'is that now that we have more information, we should discuss our course of action.'

'What do you mean...?', says Elsa, looking at both North and Tooth warily.

'Well, I gathered us here to make a promise, so to speak! I want you all to promise us to fight against Monobear with all we got!', he says, smiling expectantly at us.

Of course, all of us are... a little taken aback...

'I'm sorry, what? Are you feeling alright, St. Nick?' asks Flynn, worried.

'Yeah, um... Fighting against the Headmaster is against the rules and if the Ultimate Warrior couldn't even touch him... I-I don't think we stand a chance...' says Fishlegs, wringing his hands nervously.

'Ah, true! But I didn't mean fighting in literal sense!', says North, undeterred.

'Oh? Then what do you have in mind?' says Peter as he looks at the jolly man, interested.

Tooth speaks up this time. 'What North means is... we should fight against Monobear's wishes. We need to resist his taunts and... not kill each other as he wants us to.'

North nods, 'Yes! If we want to defeat the accursed beast, we need to show him we won't succumb to despair! We must stand tall and live in peace as friends, here!'

This... all sounds good and all... I mean... I don't want to kill anyone so I can go with his plan but...

'So, you're telling us to just give up and live here forever? Fuck that shit!', says Snotlout, voicing the doubts of a lot of us.

'Now, hold your horses, Snotlout! I never said we were going to give up!', says North with a sly grin as he holds up his ElectroID. 'Read this rule here... rule number 3.'

I take out my ElectroID as everyone else does, and read:

**\*\* - You can explore and wander around the allowed areas marked on your map as much as you want. Trying to break into non-permitted areas will earn you a punishment. \*\***

As I read, the gears in my mind start turning and working into overdrive, a smile spreading across my face as I grasp what North means.

'Oh... so that's what you meant...', I say to North. The jolly man

nods and smiles, happy that someone understands his plan.

Of course, not everyone does, and the loudest one expresses his confusion very eloquently, 'Hey! Fishbone! The fuck do you mean?'. Yup, Snotlout is... very eloquent.

Moving my bangs out of my face in exasperation, I gather my thoughts before explaining, doing my best to keep it simple for the oaf. 'Well, basically... this rule says we can explore everywhere we want inside the camp but we can't access any of the cut-off areas IN the camp... but... it doesn't forbid us to explore OUTSIDE the camp... basically... we can explore this camp in order to find a way out and since we aren't forbidden to explore the outside... if we find an escape route, we can leave!' I say, trying to contain my excitement.

North laughs loudly before shouting, 'Correct! That's what I'm talking about!'

'But will it work?' says Elsa, doubtful.

'Lighten up, sis! It's better than the alternative...' says Anna as she trails off.

'Yeah... I... don't want to kill anyone...', says Rapunzel, twisting a loose strand of her long hair into a knot.

'So, it's decided! We will coexist in peace, and search for a way out! None of this mutual killing mumbo jumbo. Agreed?' says North, excited that we understand and accept his plan.

'We will show that Monobear why they call us the Ultimates!', says Tooth excitedly, raising her fist to the air.

In our excitement, everyone pumps their fists into the air and shouts in agreement. Well, almost everyone but the most reserved ones, but I can see in their faces the approval of North's plan. Even I got pulled into the excitement, thanks to Jack who pulled my arm into the air along with his.

'Your food is ready'.

We all tense as we hear a familiar voice.

The Monobear that was at the register is standing near the table, with a tray on his hands, along with other Monobears who hold similar trays. We stare at them in tense silence as they march around us and deliver our food. Without even looking at us or saying anything to us, they leave.

Letting out a shaky breath I was holding, I mutter a sarcastic 'W-well... I'm not giving them a good review in costumer service, that's for sure...' which dispels the tense atmosphere a little.

We all dig into our breakfast and soon enough the chatter picks up and we enjoy a nice meal, the feeling of comradeship we had before all this mutual killing nonsense started. This... sense of unity.. is actually making me hopeful! Maybe we'll be able to escape soon! I'll just have to give it my all in our exploration, even if I'm not much help!

As we watch Astrid and Merida engage in a serious eating contest, Jack demanding that I duel him in an eating contest as well to which I obviously decline, I finish the rest of my Monobear-shaped hot cakes (how self-centered can you get?) before standing up, eager to start the search.

Jack, Sandy and the girls look at me in surprise as I wave them goodbye and I head to the door. Before I can leave, however, someone grabs me by my wrist. I turn around to see Jack grabbing me with a worried expression. OK... what's his deal?

'Where are you going, Hic?', the whitette asks, worried.

I roll my eyes at the nickname, 'Uh? I'm going to explore! The sooner the better, right?' I ask.

'But... alone? Wouldn't it be better if we go in groups?' says Jack, refusing to let go of my hand.

I shake my head as I subtly tug at my hand to free myself, 'Nah, we can cover more land if we are all separate.'

'Then how about we split in pairs?', says Astrid as she and Merida and Sandy catch up to us.

'What for?', I ask. We're wasting daylight here...

'For security, you numbskull! And I thought you were the brains of the group here', says Merida as she rolls her eyes.

'I don't understand what you-', I say but I'm interrupted by Sandy, who shows me a badly drawn sketch of Snotlout with a worried expression.

'Sandy's right, Hiccup.' says Astrid with a firm but concerned stare, her blue eyes showing her true emotions, 'We all promised we wouldn't kill each other but I don't trust Snotlout. That's why I think we should at least travel in pairs.'

True, I wouldn't trust Snotlout with anything... and it's true he hates me and there's also Elsa and Peter, who are kinda...

'OK fine.', I concede. It's not like I'm afraid or anything! Just... 'safety in numbers', OK?.

'So... how should we divide-', before I can ask, Jack pulls me towards himself and puts his arm over my shoulder. 'I pick Hic! Don't worry, he'll be safe with me!', he says as he pounds his chest with his other hand, proudly.

'Frankly, I'm more worried about Hiccup more than evah...' says Merida with a snicker.

Jack pouts before shouting, 'HEY! What's that supposed to mean?'

'It means now I'll have to take care of you and me', I deadpan as I head towards the doors, 'Now come on, you big baby boo.'

'Hic, you wound me so! You'll see, I'll be the best guardian ever!'

says Jack as he follows me outside, the laughing of the girls floating over to us.

'Huh... I wonder if I should just give myself up to Snotlout instead...', I say as I tap my chin in mocking thought, feeling the scab of Monobear's attack from yesterday still there.

'You're just full of sarcasm aren't you, you pipsqueak?', says Jack as he pushes me away playfully.

'Took you long enough to notice', I say, barely containing the laughter inside me.

'One day, you won't have a witty comeback for everything, you fishbone! One day!', says Jack, shaking his fist in the air, dramatically.

'That will truly be a day to remember, you frosted twig', I say as I duck under a swing of Jack's arm, laughing.

'You're so gonna get it, Hic!', and with that comment, we race away from the restaurant.

Truly, despite how much grief I give him, I like that Jack is accompanying me. It makes this endeavor more... believable. Having a friend around makes me feel like we have chance, that there's hope for us. And it is with that renewed sense of hope that we start our search.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-MONOBEAR THEATER-<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello, everyone! Welcome to Monobear Theater! I'm your drop-dead-gorgeous host, Monobear!"<p>

'Aaaaaand so, we start with this tale! Are you guys excited? Our heroes are looking full of hope, aren't they? But don't forget, Hope and Despair are two sides of the same coin! And while its true that Hope shines the brightest when Despair is all there is in your life... Despair can grow quickly even on the most hopeful of situations.

Puhuhuh... soon, those bastards will learn... Uhuhuhuhuh!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Aaand, scene.<br>\*\*

\*\*I feel like we're moving along at a snail pace, but what do you guys think? I felt like I needed some Hijack fluff here and there but I may have gotten a bit carried away.\*\*

\*\*See ya next time!\*\*



**\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - Normal Days B\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Phew, so, that took a while! Sorry for the delay, I had some business to take care of but I will hopefully get back on track soon! Not entirely pleased with this chapter but that kinda comes with the whole "Not confident on my writing" territory. I should probably get a beta or something but idkkkk<br>\*\*

**\*\*Anyways, enjoy this mess, ahahaha\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em><span>Hiccup's POV<span>\_  
><strong>

It took like 10 minutes to stop Jack from acting like a complete goofball so that we could focus on actually investigating the Camp and another 10 minutes to force Jack to wear shoes because we were going to be hiking in the wilderness.

Jack's pouting was oddly cute but I wasn't going to be swayed. I didn't want any of my friends getting injuries again.

We first decided to fully explore the Rec Area and everything it had to offer. Or rather, Jack begged and begged until I relented.

'Honestly, Jack! You're older than me! Be more mature!', I said in an annoyed voice.

'Hey! I'm mature! I just like fun! You're just a stick-in-the-mud!', said Jack in retort.

'Har har. Is that another fishbone joke?', I deadpanned.

'I'm just telling it how it is!', said the whitette as we neared the Dirty Deals Done Dirt Cheap Supermarket.

Man, I totally can smell the lawsuits the Headmaster was attracting. Seriously? A reference like that?

Shaking my head in disapproval, we entered the behemoth of a store and we were immediately assaulted by the aisles chock full of items of all shapes and colors. There were even things hanging from the ceiling and items displayed on tables. The supermarket lacked check out lines, confirming what Merida had told me earlier; all of this was really up for grabs.

And there was a variety of stuff! Like seriously... Candies of all flavors and shapes, 10 liter soda bottles, books, electronics, cleaning supplies... even furniture! It was all amazing and looking to my side, I could see Jack just itching to go off into the toy aisle.

My euphoria turned into anger, however, I found an aisle full of weaponry. Guns, swords, explosives... there was even a cannon here and some torpedoes! Monobear was at it again. No doubt he put all of this here to urge us to kill.

I suddenly lost all interest in the supermarket. I could see all the excitement draining from Jack's face as he saw the aisle as well. As we turned around to walk away, we heard a loud explosion along with a loud 'WHOOOP!'. Turning around to see the source of the noises, we saw the twins hooting and hollering as they carried a large amount of explosives.

'Man, we are so going to destroy so much stuff!', said Tuff.

'Hey, we should bring furniture too!', said Ruff, excited.

'What for? We already have the explosives!', said Tuff, lifting the bag of explosives in his hand in gesture.

'We need test subjects, duh!', said Ruff rolling her eyes.

And without even paying any attention to us (or how their hair had caught fire due to the previous explosion), they ran past us and left the store.

'Y'know, Hic... I'm more worried about them than about Snotlout...', said Jack as he saw the twins running away.

'No kidding'.

After that little display, and after deciding to pick up some drawing tools for me, we left the store, Jack happily carrying a big beach ball he found in the toy aisle.

After dropping my stuff at my cottage and after another 10 minutes of Jack goofing around with his beach ball (and smacking me with the ball like 5 times) before he put it in his cottage, we returned to the Rec Area.

As we approached the hospital, we heard several bangs and booms. Soon after from the Lounge came Snotlout running away from the twins, who were throwing small firecrackers at him and laughing hysterically as they chased him towards the Lodging Area, while Flynn cheered them on from a distance.

I almost felt bad for Snotlout. Almost.

After having a good laugh at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's expense, we walked towards the hospital. Like almost all the things in this camp, the hospital had a Monobear motif, the logo of the place showing the Headmaster in a doctor's outfit, the words 'Doctor Killgood', flashing with neon lighting.

'What a reassuring sight...', mumbled Jack, obviously not amused.

Before I could comment, I saw a familiar looking girl standing near the entrance, her lab coat and colorful hair a dead giveaway. 'Heeey! Tooth!', I shouted before walking towards her.

She jumped at my greeting but immediately shot us a smile as she recognized us. She practically ran to meet us. We exchanged some greetings while we tried to avoid the Ultimate Dentist's prodding fingers. Jack actually covered his mouth with both of his

hands.

'So... Tooth...' I said, trying to distract her, 'What are you doing here?'

My question seemed to snap the labcoat-wearing, pixie-like girl back to her senses, leaving Jack alone, who dropped his hands and sighed in relief.

'Oh! I was just trying to check out the place! Y'know, to see if it's up to standards... in case we... ever need to get treated...', her eager voice and smile vanished as she finished her sentence.

Yeah, I knew what she was thinking. I didn't want to think we'd ever need this place's services, but there were no guarantees in our situation. Tooth was actually pretty smart to think about our health care, though. I guess she really had our best interests in mind.

Jack kicked the floor nonchalantly before speaking, 'Still... don't you need to get inside the place to actually check it out? Why haven't you entered?'

Tooth's face suddenly shifted to a scowl, her voice full of anger. '\_HE\_' won't let me check it out...'

And before I could ask who 'he' was... \_HE\_ appeared as in cue.

'YOU AREN'T ALLOWED TO ENTER! THIS PLACE IS OFF-LIMITS! SO HAS SPOKEN DOCTOR KILLGOOD'!

I groaned as Monobear appeared, dressed in a full doctor's attire, right in front of us, blocking the door. Great, just what I needed. Another session of rambling nonsense from the Headmaster.

Jack was obviously not in the mood for messing around either, as he looked at the bear with pure disdain.

Mercifully, Tooth engaged the Headmaster, saving us from having to deal with the little stuffed headache. 'OK, but! You never told me WHY I can't enter!', she said, obviously exasperated, her foot tapping the floor impatiently.

At this, the Headmaster tilted his head in confusion. 'Huhhh? I didn't tell you? Well, now that you mention it, I never really did! Oops!' and he was smiling again, holding back a giggle.

I sighed. I didn't want to deal with the bear's cryptic words right now. It was obvious he wasn't going to tell us anything directly, so speaking with him was a waste of time. We all had places to be.

'Let's go guys. We can't waste our time with a toy who is pretending to be a doctor.' I said to my friends as I started to walk away from the hospital.

'HEY! I'm not playing doctor! I'm a certified medic who can take care of all of you! In fact, I was such a good doctor I didn't even need a veterinarian back at the zoo!', shouted Monobear, obviously annoyed at my comment.

Nope, not gonna happen. Not gonna take the bait. I'm not even bothering with a sarcastic reply.

'Seriously, I can't believe you're being so mean to the doctor who's operating on your best friend. Boo hoo. I'm crying so hard... my tears won't let me see when I operate... what if a malpractice happens because of that...? Uhuhuhuhu!' said Monobear in a dejected tone before finishing with that giggle of his, full of malice.

I snapped at that comment, turning back, ready to at least try to throttle the Headmaster. Jack seriously needed to stop holding me back right now, Thor so help me, because I wanted to kick the stuffed bear who just stands there smugly as he watches me struggle against my friend's hold.

'Tsk, tsk... that's no good, Hiccy!', says Monobear as he wags his finger in mock disapproval, 'You can't be this loud near a hospital! You'll upset the patients!', he starts walking back to the hospital and as he stops near the door, he turns back and he smiles, his red eye glinting dangerously, 'Don't you worry, Hiccy. Your friend will be back soon... as long as you behave. Puhuhu...!' and with that, he vanished into the hospital.

I caught the meaning of Monobear's words easily: Toothless was here. And I couldn't do anything to see him. Because if I disobeyed the Headmaster's orders, he would be in danger. I dropped down to the floor in defeat, Jack trying his best to help me stand. But I didn't want to stand. I just wanted to lie down here, and wait for my friend.

'Tooth, give me a hand here...!', I hear Jack's strained voice behind me, but I don't move my gaze away from the hospital's doors, hoping to see my friend coming out from them.

But of course he doesn't appear. He's probably still in pain... probably not even being able to move due to his injuries... He... he d...id... lose a lot of blood and...!

I stop noticing my surroundings, barely acknowledging the fact that both Tooth and Jack were holding me with my arms over their shoulders as they drag me away from the hospital.

I had to admit. I missed Toothless a lot and I was worried sick about him. No matter how much of a front I put on, I missed my scaly friend so much, and it hurt me to know he was SO close and in pain and knowing that I couldn't do anything for him at all tore my heart apart. I honestly just wanted to shut down and wallow in my misery and my sadness. I didn't want to interact with a world where Toothless was missing. Or worse.

Apparently, I was doing just that, because I was brought back to reality by a very strong slap. As I winced and rubbed my cheek to ease the pain, I noticed my surroundings. I was in the Lounge, a wooden cottage in the Rec Area which mostly contained couches, vending machines, a single bookcase and some tables with board games. A simple place to relax... if it weren't for the cameras installed on the corners.

I also noticed Tooth looking worried, Rapunzel looking guilty and...

a pair of bright blue eyes looking at me with concern. Jack.

'I'm sorry! You weren't answering us and I panicked and got worried so I just... you know! Slapped some sense into you...?' said Rapunzel, gesturing wildly and nervously. 'Please forgive me, Hiccup!'

Oh, so that was what happened. Man, I really zoned out there. No wonder Jack and Tooth look so worried.

I smiled at Rapunzel, shaking my head as I talked, 'Nah, it's OK. I kinda needed it. Thank you.'

Rapunzel's smile was very bright as she heard that, and she dashed toward the bookcase, grabbing 5 books from it, before returning to me, 'Well, if you ever need more, tell me! Cheer up, Hiccup!' and with that, she left. Guess she really was only here for the books.

Tooth and Jack, however did not leave. I sighed as I sunk into one of the couches, seeing their worried expressions. This... was one of the reasons I wasn't keen on having friends. Sure, I loved company but I also liked to solve my problems on my own. I didn't want to worry other people. I honestly didn't want them to see me so down on myself. I still was sad about Toothless.

I forced a smile and said to them that I was fine, to which Tooth responded by saying 'Don't worry, Hiccup! Everything will be fine, just believe!', with a genuine smile on her face. I... wish I could believe like she did.

Putting a hand on my shoulder, she hesitated a bit before saying, 'W-well... I need to... continue checking for possible escape routes so... Um... see you around...'

I nodded at her encouragingly, and taking that as her cue, she walked away slowly, looking back at me with worry a few times before exiting the Lounge.

Right. But Jack was still here. I looked at him, and the expression on his face made me realize he hadn't bought my lie. 'Jack, really... I'm fine.' I tried again. But he just shook his head and he silently plopped down next to me.

Was he going to question me? Ask me to open up to him and pour out my feelings? Because I so don't want to do that. M-manly vikings don't talk about their emotional problems and-

But he didn't ask. He just sat next to me, silently. He didn't prod or query me. He simply closed his eyes and waited for me to collect myself. And I appreciated it. The extra silence and his presence combined gave me time to compose my thoughts.

After a very long time of just sitting there, I decided that enough was enough. I couldn't just waste my time here. We all had a mission and I was doing nothing to help. I stood up slowly, Jack doing the same as he smiled at me brightly. 'Ready to go?', he asked eagerly.

'Yeah', I nodded, '...and, um, thank you... for, well, everything', I

added, sheepishly.

'Hic, I don't know what you're talking about.' he said, his smile all-too-knowing of what he had done.

I rolled my eyes and I motioned him to follow me and as we left the lounge, I let the feeling of gratefulness in my heart spread through my whole body. This frosty idiot... was far more understanding than what I had assumed.

\* \* \*

><p>Checking out the rest of the Camp was far more time consuming than we thought. We had finished checking out the Rec Area by 1PM, so we decided to hasten our steps as we headed south to check the next area.<p>

A cool breeze greeted us as we emerged from the bushery that was growing all over the abandoned dirt path that led into the shores of Lake Despair. Despite the name, the lake was anything but despair-inducing. The water was clear and clean, you could easily see the bottom of the lake. Jack immediately ran towards the edge of the lake and started splashing around like a kid on the shallow water. Judging from Jack's reaction, the water was cool, not exactly too cold or hot... just right.

It really... looked out of place, this lake, on a place where killings were supposed to happen. The atmosphere on this lake was peaceful... and almost perfect. A fence cutting across the middle of the lake marred the scene a little but the place was still beautiful. I guess we can't swim away from here, though.

After coaxing Jack out of the water and investigating the shoreline in hope of finding a clue to escape, and after resisting the urge to smash the camera installed near the shoreline, we left the area without any results.

The last area left to investigate was north of the Rec Area, and it was quite away from the Lake. The walk there wasn't boring, though, because Jack couldn't stop making stupid jokes. Fine, I did laugh at them, but still!

On our way there, however, one of Jack's whines caught my attention.

'Man, I wish there was a blizzard going here right now... it's so hoooot!' said Jack, tugging at his hoodie while fanning himself with his hand dramatically.

'Well, you were the blockhead who decided to wear winter clothing in summer...', I retorted.

'Don't be mean, Hic! I'm seriously gonna die here! Man, a blizzard like the one my mom told me about would be perfec-'

'Hold on! Did you just say... your mom told you about a blizzard...?'. That's weird, I thought Jack didn't remember anything outside of his name, age, and the fact that he had a little sister.

Jack looked as if he had only realized what he was saying, his mouth slightly agape. He suddenly blushed slightly, and he rubbed the back of his head embarrassingly. Heh... his quirks were becoming noticeable.

'Y-yeah... I... I might have remembered something... recently...'

Now this... was good news! I asked him excitedly about the memory, eager to know more about my friend.

Oddly, he looked away from me and mumbled, 'I... don't really remember much... just that fact...'

Why was Jack acting weird? I thought for sure he would be more excited than this...

'I... remembered that when... we were at the Lounge...' he said, still mumbling.

Huh? Did he? OK... but that's no reason to act weird and secretive. But I decided not to push it. He didn't back when I was feeling all gloomy and I was going to return the favor.

Patting his back, I smiled reassuringly at him. 'Well, I'm glad your memory is returning. Maybe you'll remember everything soon!'

He looked super relieved at the fact that I wasn't poking around for more details about his memory and I can't help but laugh at his expression. Seriously, what's up with him?

With a new spring on his step, we soon reach the Mountainside Road, but our exploration got cut short when a giant door and fence block our way. Near the door is Aster, who is looking around the area warily, not noticing us. Jack smiles devilishly and shouts a big 'HEY BUNNY!', which makes the Ultimate Survivalist jump.

Aster only glares at Jack as the white haired dork drops to the floor laughing. Deciding that I don't want to be gutted like a fish just by being in association with this idiot (why did Aster have to be so graphic with his survival anecdotes!?), I walked towards the silver-haired boy and apologized to him in Jack's behalf.

'S nothin' to worry 'bout, mate.' he says dismissively, 'So, you explorin'?'

I nod. 'Yeah, but we haven't found anything useful... you?'

'Fraid not, mate. Can't even get past this gate either, and Monobear ain't answerin' me'

Jack walks up to us, his face serious and ElectroID in hand. 'Huh... but that's odd. The map shows there's something behind this gate.'

I rub my chin with my hand as I think. 'So... I guess we just found our first restricted area... but why would Monobear do that? Seems odd he would confine us to just one place of the camp.'

Aster interrupts me. 'That ain't the only bizarre thing, kid. Haven't you noticed how... quiet this places is?'

We both look at him confused. He gives an exasperated look before continuing. 'I mean... we're in the middle of a forest yet... no birds! No critters running amok! Nothin'!'

My eyes widen at this, realization dawning on me. Aster was right. I hadn't even seen a mosquito or a fly, much less fish on the lake. 'Could... could it be this place is... artificial completely...?'

'It would make sense, Hic... the person behind this was already powerful enough to do all of the things he's done so far...', Jack adds.

'But blimey... is there really someone powerful enough and rich enough to pull this off...?', says Aster, not quite believing what we were discussing.

A long silence stands between us as we try to find answers to every question, but the answers elude us. Aster finally groans, breaking the silence. 'A'right, I give up for today. At least we got familiar with our surroundings...'

I smile as I understand the need to be aware of your surroundings, a true survival skill. A whine catches my attention, recognizing the deep voice anywhere.

'Hiic, I'm tired and hungry! Let's call it a day', says Jack, obviously playing up his complain for comedic effect.

Well, it is 5 PM. Might as well grab dinner.

'Sure, I'm hungry as well.' I turn to Aster, 'Want to come with us to the restaurant?'

'Nah, I think I'll grab somethin' from the supermarket to spice up my room. 'Sides, I don't want to spend time with the Amazingly Annoyin' Human Frostbite', he says as he smirks at Jack. I laugh at the scowl on Jack's face, and Aster nods approvingly.

'See ya later, ankle biter. Take care.' he says as he walks past me and ruffles my hair. On our way back to the restaurant, Jack complains about Aster all the way, saying the Ultimate Survivalist doesn't know how to have fun. Guess Jack didn't leave a good impression on Aster back when we met in that room. But I'm pretty sure Jack was partially to blame on that. Sure, Aster didn't have the sunniest disposition, but Jack wasn't exactly a saint. I was surprised I had tolerated him for this long, but then again, it wasn't like his company was unpleasant or anything and he was actually pretty good looki-

Yeah, OK. Whoa. I need to stop that train of thought.

I don't voice any of my thoughts to Jack, obviously, as we make our way to the restaurant.

\* \* \*

><p>When we arrive at McMonobear's, we find it empty. Huh, guess everyone is still looking around... I really hope they find



something.<p>

A movement near the corner of my eye catches my attention, however, and I realize we aren't alone here. Because a certain Ultimate Thief was sneaking around, edging closer to the cashier, his eyes focused on the machine, and his movements slow, but smooth and precise.

The sight made me chuckle, but Flynn was so focused on his mission that he didn't even hear me. So much for an Ultimate Thief... he wasn't paying attention to his surroundings and the aqua blue vest and white shirt ensemble wasn't exactly sneaky.

Plus, he was trying to steal something worthless!

Shaking my head as Flynn's fingertips were nearly on the cashier, his eyes sparkling with excitement, I spoke up.

'Uh... you do know that the cashier doesn't have any money, right? They don't charge us for anything here, so...'

'Yikes!', Flynn shouted as he jumped far away from the cashier as if it had suddenly burst into flames. He lost his balance and landed on his butt. Of course, Jack was having a good laugh at his expense already.

'Don't scare me like that, kid! I think I lost like 10 years of my lifespan.' said the brown haired teen as he got up and dusted himself off, a scowl on his face.

Snickering, Jack said: 'That's what you get for trying to steal an empty cashier!'

Flynn blushed, obviously embarrassed at his blunder, before mumbling, 'I... I just wanted to keep my skills sharp...'

Ah, I get it. I guess all of the Ultimates do have to keep practicing their skills in order to get better. I briefly think about how I would practice my Luck before dismissing the ridiculous notion; my talent isn't real. But Flynn's talent was real, unsavory activities notwithstanding. Maybe I can give him some pointers...?

I rub my arm, not looking at Flynn while I mutter: 'W-well... you were doing just fine... you just need to pay better attention to your surroundings... is all.'

The Ultimate Thief just looks at me, a confused gaze plastered on his face.

'I m-mean... you didn't even notice us when I laughed... a thief has to be in constant alert, right?' I finish, unsure. Did I go too far? Was I being too meddlesome?

'Huh... I never noticed that... I'll keep that in mind, kid', said Flynn, a sly smirk playing on his lips. Relief washed over me as I saw how nicely he had taken my comment.

'Seriously, dude.' says Jack, 'How did you even avoid getting caught?'

Flynn's smile only got wider as he stared at Jack, 'Well, I am a

pretty good runner. There's probably no one better than me at it', he said with confidence.

I turned to see Jack's face and I groaned internally as I saw exactly what I was fearing; Jack's eyes were shining with excitement. We're reaching Bad Idea Central, courtesy of Mr. Overland.

'Oh, really? I bet I can beat you in race', said the white haired idiot. Did this guy ever run out of energy? And what's with his obsession with racing? This guy just can't resist a challenge.

Hopefully Flynn would be the mature one and-

'You're on, kid. One lap around the camp. Ready?'

'You bet your goatee I am!', said Jack, earnest excitement in his voice.

And without even looking at me, they're gone, sprinting like Terrible Terrors after fish. I didn't expect Flynn to be kinda childish but maybe he's just that confident on himself?

I... wonder how... that feels... Confidence.

A grumble on my stomach snaps me out of my blues and I order a simple grilled chicken burger, and as I eat in solitude, I try to not let my thoughts wander towards Toothless... towards our current situation.

I can't break down again. If not for my sake... then for Jack's. I still can remember the look on his eyes back when I... 'awoke' from my self-imposed shut down. The extreme worry on his face... Yeah, it wasn't a nice sight. I never wanted to see that look ever again.

So, no matter what, I had to be strong. Monobear be damned.

With a sigh, I finished the last bite of my food and headed towards the exit. Maybe I'll be able to catch the white-haired idiot running by...

\* \* \*

><p>I didn't see Jack anywhere, and there was still some time left before Night Time started... and while I was a master at the whole 'Seclude Yourself in your Room' life style, I didn't want to shut myself inside my room just yet.<p>

Maybe... should I hang out with someone? I can't just cling to Jack like an overbearing girlfriend... but who should I hang out with...?

As I walk around the Rec Area, my eyes drift to the laundromat. We didn't explore it because it was out of order (A bummer, really, I wanted to wash this shirt), but something else caught my attention. Someone was standing on front of the place. I could recognize that pale blonde hair and pale complexion anywhere else.

I don't know motivated me to hang with HER of all people available, but maybe... just maybe... I was losing my mind.

'Hello, Elsa'

The girl is obviously startled by my greeting. Her expression tells me as much as she turns to face me. She quickly changes her expression into a glare, the coldness of it leaving me... well, cold.

'What do you want?', she speaks in a cold, monotonous tone.

Yyyeah... I didn't plan this through, did I?

An uncomfortable silence stretches between us, her glare still focused on me. I just can't come up with topics for small talk to break the ice, either.

Finally, an exasperated sigh leaves Elsa's lips, her glare disappearing. 'I said, what do you want, Mr...?'

'Oh! Um... Haddock. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock.', Geez, she didn't even remember my name...

'Mr. Haddock... why are you talking to me? What is it that you need? An autograph? Money?', Elsa continues, her voice harsh and questioning. 'If this is to ask me out or something I-'

Whoa! Whoa, time out! I lifted my hands in order to stop Elsa from talking. 'I don't want anything! I just... want to talk... yeah!', I said as I gestured nervously.

The glare she gave me told me she wasn't buying it. But I was being honest! I didn't want anything from her, much less dating!

'Hmph... they all say the same thing...' she muttered, more to herself than anyone.

My curiosity got the best of me. Without thinking, I blurted out 'Why do you hate me?', mentally slapping myself at my inability for controlling my tongue.

Another shocked expression appeared on Elsa's face. Guess the Ice Queen had a few cracks on her ice mask.

'Why... do you think I hate you?'

'Well, for one, you always glare at me as if I were a smoked eel, you refuse to even interact with me and whenever Anna greets me you kill me with your stare in like 50 different ways', I said as I counted off the items on the list with my fingers, knowing full well that I was pushing my luck with sarcasm.

Elsa stood there still shocked. And I wondered if I had pushed it a little too far.

The Ultimate Figure Skater spoke up, her tone of voice even, as if she were holding back some emotion: 'You... I don't have anything against you specifically...'

'Then... why?'

'You're a stranger. I don't know any of you... why should I act all friendly with you guys?' she asked, her eyes not fully meeting mine, as if she were afraid of seeing me.

Well, she did have a point... especially in a situation like ours, dropping our guard in front of total strangers would be quite foolish. But still...

'Well... I'm not really a social butterfly but...' I said as I rubbed the back of my head, 'Would it be so bad if we stopped being strangers...?'

In an instant, her gaze stiffened, her glare increasing in coldness. 'Well, I'm sorry to say... that I'm not interested... and I would like to request of you that you don't approach me again. If you'll excuse me...' and with that, she left... in quite a hurry, I might add.

Elsa Arendelle, the Ultimate Figure Skater, her demeanor matches her title and clothes, an undeniable cold exterior and disposition. Yet... what I saw in her eyes was something else. Distrust, uneasiness... loneliness and longing. And in that moment I wondered if I had really met the real Elsa Arendelle at all.

\* \* \*

><p>After that bout of exhausting human interaction, I returned to my cottage. It was already 8 PM by the time I returned, and only then did I realize it had been 2 days since our capture. It honestly felt longer than that.<p>

After taking a much needed shower, I sat in my bed, noticing how bare my room was. Maybe a trip to the supermarket was needed... and I can't believe I was seriously considering furnishings my cage. Shaking my head, I picked up the sketchbook I found at the supermarket and I started to draw lazily on it, most of the doodles being the usual dragons. Skrills, Terrible Terrors and Gronckles slowly filled the page but of course most of the drawings were of my bud, Toothless. I had to admit that I drew Night Furies a little too much but they were special y'know?

I started drawing on a new page absentmindedly until static buzzed on the nearby monitor, Monobear's stupid face appearing on it, still drinking that lemonade like yesterday's announcement.

'Uh, it is now 10 PM! Night Time has begun! The restaurant and laundromat are now closed! Please return to your cottages and let the soothing sound of summer and cicadas lull you to sleep. Sweet dreams everyone, Gooood night!'

'There aren't any cicadas in this camp, you dumb bear...' I mouthed under my breath, rolling my eyes at the Headmaster's announcement. Feeling drained of energy all of a sudden, I went to close my sketchbook in order to go to bed and then I noticed what I was sketching.

It was Jack. a full blown picture of him smiling a cocky smile, eyes closed from the gesture.

I closed the sketchbook way faster than I had intended to, the flushed feeling on my cheek way too obvious. Gods, what was wrong with me? Why was I getting embarrassed about this? Friends draw other friends, right? And Jack was a good friend! Sure, annoying and a troublemaker but he was also caring and understanding and protective... a good friend, overall!

Yeah, I'm sure the stress from today was just messing with my mind. Sighing loudly, I stood up to turn off the lights and I plopped down to my bed, the sketchbook forgotten in the middle of the floor.

'Honestly Haddock...' I said, admonishing myself for thinking about Jack like that. I had admitted to myself long ago that I would date anyone pretty much regardless of gender and Jack was good looking enough, but I also knew the risks of my orientation... and I didn't want to lose a friend simply because of that. Especially my first human friend.

Plus there was the whole Field Trip of Mutual Killing nonsense. Getting a crush right now... was utter madness.

Trying to convince myself of this, I closed my eyes and after turning and tossing for an hour I managed to fall asleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- MONOBEAR THEATER-<br>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Y'know something? Kids scare me. Why, you ask? Simple. They're far too honest.<p>

Unlike us learned adults who know how to lie and pretend in order to make our society function, kids blurt anything that comes to their minds without filters. They lack tact. And while some find that honesty endearing, I am utterly mortified everytime a kid gets near me and calls me a fat, stupid, useless old bear who no one would miss if I died. Because they're voicing what they really think. What they really see about me, no filters or regards for tact or appearances.

Children are... truly frightening creatures.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Phew! Hopefully that was interesting enough. I kinda dread doing expository chapters, y'know? I feel like they're not actiony enough! Probably me just being dumb!<strong>

\*\*Anyways, hope it was entertaining! We also had our first Free Time Event, the first place going to Elsa, surprisingly! Keep voting for them characters, though! I'll probably churn these chapters out sooner now that I have free time again.\*\*

\*\*Enjoy these peaceful chapters while they last. Soon, shit will hit the fan, as they say, Puhuhuhu!\*\*

\*\*See ya guys next chapter, and please review! It gives me confidence

to see that so many people have even viewed this fic, but I kinda would like to read your thoughts more!\*\*

## 8. 1 - Chapter 1 - Normal Lives C

**\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - Normal Days C\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Today is a special day! I bring you a double update! Two chapters for the prize of one! Well, the second chapter is shorter than this one but its not any less important!<br>\*\*

**\*\*Today's chapter also features Free Time with Flynn. Speaking of Free Time, I added a poll on my profile, so you can vote there now!\*\***

**\*\*Also, I reduced the rating to T for the meanwhile because there's honestly nothing M-rating worthy yet but I guess I'll change it back when that content happens.\*\***

**\*\*Without further ado... dig in!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Monobear's morning announcement roused me from sleep. I merely grunted in disdain at it, still too angry to even speak back at the image of him. I wasn't going to forgive the bear for what he did to Toothless ever. But staying in here festering in my own anger wasn't going to accomplish anything. I put on my clothes (should I get more from the supermarket?) and shoes and I was just starting to leave when a loud knock started on my door.

I wasn't surprised to see Jack at the door, truth be told, but seeing Astrid, Merida and Sandy next to him was surely a surprise.

'The Protect Hiccup squad, ready for duty, sir!', said Jack, standing tall and doing a mock salute before Astrid punched his arm with a scowl, Merida and Sandy laughing at the pained expression of the white haired teen.

Alright... what's going on? 'Am I missing something...?' I asked. A familiar sketchbook was trusted on my face, Sandy's words clearly displayed on it, 'It was Jack's idea!'

Astrid read the words as Sandy pulled the sketchbook back, and said with a nod, 'Yeah, a pretty good idea if you ask me.'

''bout the only good one he has evah had if ya ask me', said Merida, snorting.

Jack glared at the girl, obviously annoyed at how everyone was ganging up on him. Still confused about this, I crossed my arms and arched an eyebrow as I waited for an answer.

Jack caught my stare and coughed, embarrassed. 'Well, you see, I started to think about Snotlout like we did yesterday and I

thought... y'know...'

'What Jack is trying to say', said Astrid as she too crossed her arms, 'is that we're going to stick together during our stay here.'

'Safety in numbers!', said Merida while Sandy merely nodded.

Jack just looked at me sheepishly, 'So... here we are!'

I groaned a bit, bringing the palm of my hand to my forehead. Great, I was just trying to squash any kind of possible feelings I was developing for this white haired idiot and here he was, worried about my safety. 'I suppose I don't have a choice...'

The four of them all shouted (well, three shouted and one wrote) a synchronized 'Nope!' and I knew it was futile to resist. Jack grabbed me by my arm and pulled me towards the group, grinning that stupidly white smile of his. 'C'mon Hic! Let's grab us some chow!'

'Alright alright', I said in a defeated tone. Truth be told, I was hungry and I felt safer with these guys, at ease even. As we walked towards the restaurant, making idle chatter about things like how Monobear had the gall of waking us up so early and how terrible it was that the lake's beauty had been marred by a fence, and how surprisingly good the food at McMonobear's was, Merida suddenly whinned.

'Ugh, that accursed bear and his plans have put a damper on my archery practice!'

Astrid looked at her with an understanding look on her face, 'Yeah, I haven't been able to practice my fighting skills either. I feel like I'm getting rusty by missing two days in a row.'

...Did this girl fight every hour of her life?

'I know, right! Sure wish we had someone to practice with...', said Merida as she trailed off.

I noticed Sandy was rather pensive and then, as an idea made its way on his mind, he lifted a finger and smiled widely as he wrote something in his sketchbook rather hastily. What I read on that notebook of his made my blood chill.

'Why don't you guys train together?'

No. Absolutely not. No way. I was going to get tangled up in this mess one way or another and I-

'Sandy... that's a great idea!' said Merida, jumping and clapping in place.

'How could I have missed that...? A sparring partner was next to me and I didn't notice her!', said Astrid, her eyes wide with excitement.

'Yeah! This is gonna be great! I can tell...', Merida's eyes fell on me and what I dreaded happened, realization filling her face, 'We can even have Hiccup here help us!'

Soon enough, Astrid's eyes focused on me and that dread turned into real fear. Thor, why? 'Yeah...! A Berkian Warrior assisting us in training is sure to be interesting...'

I sighed loudly at this, 'Guys... I'm not a warrior. We made that clear before, remember?'

Merida grabbed my hands rather harshly and her tone was practically begging, 'C'moon Hiccup! Please? Pretty please? I can't stop practicin'! I'll lose my edge!'

Astrid joined in the begging, but not as extremely as the red haired girl, 'Please? We have no one else to turn to.'

Jack was looking at us rather amusedly, and he chimed in with his own comment, 'Y'know Hic... you better just accept... You're dealing with these girls after all.'

Sandy walked next to him and nodded, and now the four of them were looking eagerly at me. Great, today was 'Ganging up on Hiccup' day, right?

I sighed in defeat, 'Alright fine! But if I lose a limb I'll never ever talk to you guys again!', I said, pointing at them angrily while I tried to give the most severe glare I could muster.

To my surprise, Astrid hugged me, a reaction completely at odds from my expectations of an Ultimate Warrior. But then again, despite their titles, these kids were just that, kids. I really needed to stop dehumanizing them.

Astrid broke the hug and punched my arm slightly, 'Thanks, Hiccup.', genuine feelings of gratefulness on her words.

'We should do this after our search!' said Merida, bubbling with excitement.

Astrid turned back to her and started walking to the restaurant, 'Yeah, that way I can plan a routine as well...' and her voice trailed off as she and Merida walked away, the whole 'Protect Hiccup' plan thankfully forgotten, leaving Jack, Sandy and I behind.

A nudge on my ribs grabbed my attention, Jack being the one who did the gesture, a mischievous smile playing on his lips. 'Look at you Hic. You're quite the heartbreaker.'

I rolled my eyes, trying to ignore the playful smile of Sandy, 'Shut it Frosty, before I break you.' Oh. Did I speak too much?

Jack just took in stride, a cocky grin on his face, 'Frosty? Really Hic?'

'I just wasn't feeling Jackass or Frosted Twig anymore, Jack.' I said in a mocking, all-knowing tone, 'Change is the spice of life, young grasshopper!'

'Hic, I'm older than you!'

'Really? I could've swore I was dealing with a 5 year



old.'

'Sometimes I wonder if you just ask for trouble, Hic.' Said Jack, a playful glare on his face.

'Well, y'know', I said, bringing up my arm and flexing it as much as I could to show off my almost nonexistent bicep, 'tough vikings like me deal with trouble all the time!'

That did it, Jack absolutely lost it and fell to the ground in a mix of chortles. 'Goddamn it... Hiccup...! How do you...? How can you even say stuff like that so easily...?'

Score one more for me. If there was anything I was good at, it was witty banter. 'Y'know... I have my moments.' I said, trying to fight the urge to laugh, glancing at Sandy who was laughing silently at our exchange. The Ultimate Dream Interpreter caught my glance and he scribbled away on his sketchpad a simple drawing of a burger.

Right, we need to get breakfast. Nodding at Sandy, I started walking towards the restaurant, only briefly stopping to call Jack's name to make him stop laughing that infectious laugh of his that lightened his face in such a nice manne-

Focus Hiccup, Gods!

As we walked towards the restaurant, Jack catching up to us but walking alongside Sandy and playing a quick game of Hangman on his sketchbook, I seriously had to struggle with keeping my eyes off the white haired idiot, who was giving Sandy the time of his life with his ridiculous guesses. (Seriously, Jack. Platypus is not a 5 letter word!)

...Odin's ghost, I was pretty much hopeless, wasn't I?

\* \* \*

><p>Breakfast was pretty uneventful. Merida and Astrid were planning away their training regime and I had to grimace when I heard '10 minute swordfight session' from their hushed whispers. Jack and Sandy were playing charades (incredibly so, Jack was losing badly) but the Ultimate Mystery still had the time to laugh at my expression. But outside of that, yeah, breakfast was uneventful.<p>

Or it would have been if it weren't for the Twins.

Snotlout was being a muttonhead, flexing and showing off to a clearly not interested Rapunzel (Amusingly, I noticed that Flynn wasn't too happy about this), when it happened. As Snotlout went to for a bite on his breakfast burrito, the dish exploded loudly in his face, food splattering all over the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's face.

Of course, laughter erupted from our group, Jack and Flynn being the most boisterous, though North wasn't behind. From the corner of my eyes, I saw Tuffnut and Ruffnut high fiving, and headbutting, each other obviously very proud of themselves.

After a few more laughs, and some Snotlout grumbling, North finally managed to put up his laughter under control and asked us to pipe down in order to discuss our findings from yesterday.

Unfortunately, as I had dreaded, no one had found out anything important. The cheery mood we all had shared just a few moments ago vanished. However, North's loud clap snapped us out from our daze. 'Well! No use in getting mopey! Must not lose hope yet, yes?' he said, earnestly.

'Aye to that mate. I ain't givin' up against such a small beast like that bear just yet.', said Aster, confidence returning to his features.

'Yeah! Let's give it our best today, guys!', said Anna, her excitement returning faster than any of could've imagined. I guess her optimism was one of her redeeming qualities.

'Oh! Oh! That reminds me!', said Fishlegs, excited as he fumbled around his pocket and fished around for his ElectroID, 'Yesterday while I messed around with my ElectroID, I discovered a new function!'. The Ultimate Encyclopedia eagerly punched around something on his ID and a few moments later, a buzz sounded on all our ElectroIDs simultaneously.

Taking out the device, a simple message was displayed on its screen.

'I'm 100% sure this is IM- That's short for Instant Messaging, by the way!'

I had to admit, this was a nice function. 'Very impressive, Fishlegs.', I said to him, the blonde boy obviously embarrassed about a sincere compliment.

'Yeah, this is going to help us a lot in our investigations!', said Tooth, smiling brightly.

'So what're we waitin for?! Let's get to it!', said Merida fiercely.

And with a renewed sense of hope, we filed out from the restaurant, Jack quickly catching up to me and with him at my side, the hope I felt grew exponentially more.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

After some more hours of looking for anything, any kind of clue about an escape route... We came up empty-handed. Defeated, we returned to the Rec Area, but Hiccup, saying something along the lines of 'we shouldn't waste the day', decided to go to the supermarket in order to get some clothes and things for his room. Deciding to do the same, I followed him. But I did so not only for the material goods, but for my companion. I gazed into his freckled face and while he looked tired and a bit disappointed, he didn't look as hopeless as yesterday... What a relief.

I had to admit, despite how odd they all were, the other students certainly knew how to give pep talks. Especially Nick. He was a born leader and I seriously felt bad for doubting him. Or any of the others. Slowly, but surely I started to trust these guys. And let me

tell you, for someone with no memories like me, making new, fun memories... well, let's just say I was very grateful for them.

For more than one reason. They had helped me cheer up the little fishbone walking next to me, and I was grateful. Beyond belief.

So far, my plan was succeeding. Staying around Hic triggered a small memory, a flicker. I saw my mom's face and her tale about a harsh blizzard. It was small, but reassuring.

But my motivation for staying around Hiccup had changed, I could tell. And I honestly felt bad for using the kid as a tool. He honestly looked like he wanted to help me get my memories back, his worry real. It honestly made me sick, the fact that I was just playing with his company.

But then I realized I was starting to hang out with him not because of my plans, but because I genuinely enjoyed his company. His sarcastic remarks, his wit, the way he gestured when he got nervous, his awkwardness... I truly believed he was a good friend in my lost past... and if that were the case... then even if he doesn't remember me now, I'm gonna befriend him again.

Because I... don't think I can leave this scrawny kid alone. Especially not when that fucking bear is so set on tormenting us. So I'll.. y'know... just stay and keep him company.

'If you keep staring out at space like that, I'm going to start believing in trolls, y'know?'

Ah, there it is, that nasally voice of his delivering another sharp witty line. I grin back to the fishbone of a Viking as he looks at me with an arched eyebrow and a toothy grin, an expression I only see on him when he's confident and comfortable around other people.

'Well, Hic! That's the thing! Trolls and magical creatures are real! I saw the Tooth Fairy just yesterday!'

He looks at me with a 'are-you-serious?' face and I can't help but feel like laughing, but I can't just yet; my 'routine' isn't done.

'Oh, reaaally?', he says with the same expression, crossing his arms, 'Jack, we've been here since 2 days ago. WHEN did you see the Tooth Fairy?'

He took the bait. Grinning even wider, I grab Hiccup's shoulders and spin him in order to show him Tooth, who is a few aisles away, checking out the various dentifrice brands and clicking her tongue at some of them disapprovingly.

'I'd say she's pretty real, don't you think?', I say, barely controlling my laughter. I feel a sharp jab on my gut, a feeling I'm already familiar with as Hiccup's hand retreats to his side.

'Jack, you're such an idiot', he says, but I can tell there's no malice in his tone or his face, that grin of his too telling.

I shove him back playfully, 'What? If dragons are real, then who says the Tooth Fairy isn't?', I retort.

'I'm not even going to give an answer to that', he says with a finality, turning his attention to a stack of clothes, which he starts to browse, discarding any that aren't green, brown or black.

I playfully lean on him, making Hiccup lose his balance momentarily but not entirely, and I can feel his glare even though I'm not seeing it directly, 'Hiiiiic, why are you so mean? I give you solid proof of a magical creature and you just brush me off.'

He moves away from me fast, and since I was actually fully leaning on him, I stumble to the ground. 'The only proof I got is that you're a doofus, without a doubt', I hear from above me. I get up rather nimbly if I do say so myself, and follow the Ultimate Lucky Student as he goes for the entrance, where he deposits the clothes he picked up in a box that contains paints, colors and charcoals. A box next to his, mine by the way, is full of blue and brown clothing, the vast majority of them being for winter weather.

What can I say? I like hoodies a lot.

'No wonder you almost died of heatstroke yesterday.' says Hiccup, who looks at my box's content disapprovingly.

'Can it, dragon boy.' I say as I pick up my box.

'Well, that was very original Jack. If I weren't holding a box right now', he says as he picks up the one that belongs to him, 'I would have given you a rancorous round of applause and a standing ovation!'

'You can still do that without a reason you know', I say as we briskly walk away from the supermarket, 'After all, I'm pretty amazing just by being here in your presence.'

'Yeah, it's an amazing miracle of life that you haven't forgotten how to breathe.' Ouch, OK. This kid is really coming at me with no holds barred.

It seems he's realized what he said because I hear a low, 'I'm sorry... I didn't mean to...'

'It's OK Hic, I forgive you', and I truly do. Because I know he didn't mean to. In fact, I kinda like how he acts around me as if I hadn't lost my memory. I like how he doesn't pity me for it either. His worry about me and my feelings are genuine. 'It doesn't bother me, really. Besides,' I say with a playful grin, 'you will pay me back when Astrid kicks your ass.'

I hear him groan dramatically and I laugh, 'You're coming to watch?', he asks, although I'm sure he knows my answer already.

'Wouldn't miss it for the world, Hic. Now let's get this to our cottages, it's almost time!'

'Oh, joy...'

I chuckle at his displeasure. Sure, our future... especially my future... is uncertain... but spending time with these guys... with

this guy... for the rest of my life in peace? Just like this, every day? Even if I never recovered my memory? I wouldn't mind it... not at all..

'Y'know, Jack... you never told me how your race against Flynn ended...', says Hiccup in a questioning tone.

'T-that's not important...!', I say, stuttering. There was no way I was going to admit that he ran circles around me.

Hiccup just snorts, apparently knowing already the results of our race. What a cheeky, charming smartass.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

I don't even know why I was here, to be honest, or why was there even a need for a sparring session between Astrid and Merida. Or if this even qualified as 'sparring', because they looked extremely serious about kicking each other's butt.

Practice wooden swords clashed and in a flash separated, the two girls circling each other with a guarded stance. Even though they weren't fighting right now, a charged feeling emanated from them, and I couldn't even keep try to keep my eyes away from the scene. Sandy sat next to me, a sketch of the two girls abandoned halfway as he too kept an eye on the training session, and while Jack pretended he wasn't interested, his gaze never left the two fighters once they started.

Sudden movement caught my attention again and I had to gasp as Astrid leapt high in the air, spinning in midair before bringing down her sword towards Merida with an almost inhuman speed.

To her credit, the Ultimate Archer managed to block the blow but at a prize. Her sword broke from the impact and before she could have reacted, Astrid landed next to her and tripped Merida up with a swipe of her leg. The match ended when Astrid brought her sword to Merida's neck, the blonde sporting a confident smirk, the redhead a scowl on her face as she blew a strand of hair from her face.

That 'light sparring session' took 20 minutes.

'Not bad', said Astrid, offering the fallen redhead a hand.

'Well, you're pretty impressive yerself', said Merida, taking her hand with a light blush on her cheeks.

And they weren't being modest. All through the session, their movements were exhilarating, fierce but precise, quick but strong. Especially Astrid's. Her Ultimate Warrior title wasn't for show; the wooden sword she held truly moved as if it were an extension of her arm, and her battle moves were obviously practiced.

Sandy and Jack run towards the girls, shouting praises and congratulations, I following slowly behind. The girls accept the praises with pleasure, especially Merida. She really did well for being an Ultimate Archer.

'So, what did you think?', said Astrid after she saw me.

'Well, I'm gonna be honest', I say as I shrug, 'I really don't know why you guys even want to spar with me outside of maybe you guys wanting to kick my ass. You both are, uh, amazing.' I finish sheepishly.

Astrid grins before punching me in the arm yet again, but I can tell my compliment hit the mark, as her eyes are filled with warmth.

'Specially you, Merida! I thought you were the Ultimate Archer, not the Ultimate Swordswoman!', I say as I turn to face the red-head who just grins and brings me up for a hug, which I return awkwardly. This kind... of human contact is... too much!

'Aw, you're just tryin' to soften me up so that I don't beat ya too harshly', says Merida breaking up the hug, her tone of voice teasing.

I roll my eyes and cross my arms. 'Seriously, Merida. Astrid. I'm not fighting you guys! I just saw what you guys are capable of and I don't relish the idea of ending up like that wooden sword.' I say as I kick the discarded stick away.

'C'moon Hiccup! I wanna see yer moves!', said Merida, still insisting.

'A-absolutely not!', I said, firmly. 'I have self-preservation instincts, y'know? I'm not gonna fight a stronger opponent! B-besides... you broke the only swords you brought!'

'How about hand-to-hand combat? We could always try that...' offered Astrid, her eyes twinkling dangerously. Oh boy.

'A-as I said... I don't relish the idea of getting my ass kick-', but before I could finish, an exasperated sight from the blonde cuts me off.

'Look, if we got you an opponent that is not us, would you do it?'

I narrow my eyes at this, 'W-why are you so insisting on this?'

'Because were worried about you, Hiccup!', interjects Merida, also exasperated. 'Look, no offense, Hiccup, but you're not exactly the most... intimidating guy around.' Ouch, 'So we want to make sure you can take care of yerself! Especially in a place like this!'

OK, even if she was right... hearing it from someone else was harsh. Dad always used to scold me for trying to walk away from self-defense classes, using the same insults as the girls in front of me. 'I... can take care of myself...', I mumbled stubbornly.

'Then prove it!', both of them yelled at the same time, startling me enough to make me jump.

Of all the...! And they say Vikings are stubborn?! Clearly they haven't met these girls.

'Fine!', I all but spat the word, but the girls aren't even fazed, instead hooting and high fiving at my answer. 'I just hope you don't get North or Snotlout into this... I told you I don't wanna die...'

'Don't worry about it.' says Astrid, dismissing my comment with a wave of her hand. 'Jack, do you want to help?'

At this, I froze in place. I slowly turned to see the white haired teen standing there, shocked as well. Jack fidgets in place, tugging at the hem of his hoodie. 'Uh... what?'

'Well, if Hiccup won't spar against us, we figured you'd be up for it! I mean, we aren't making Sandy fight Hiccup, so you're the only one left.', says Merida nonchalantly, as if there was nothing wrong with what she just said.

'I'm not so sure about this Mer...', said Jack, as he rubbed the back of his head a thing he did when he was nervous.

'Yeah... I... you said you'd get me an... opponent of my level and...' I say as I rub my arm awkwardly, but then I gasp at the realization of what I have just said. And sure enough, as I look into Jack's eyes, I can see the glint on those blue pools of his, shining with the prospect of a challenge.

'Oooh? is that so Hic? Are you saying I'm not at your level...?'

'N-no I-'

'Are you saying you can defeat me easily?'

Well, if you don't have experience then maybe-no wait what am I thinking?! 'No, Jack, listen, I-'

'You are so on, Hic', Jack says as he walks boldly towards Merida, taking her place.

...I wonder if I can outrun them... hiding on my cottage sounds like a good idea...

'C'mon Hic! Bring it on!', shouts Jack, jumping in place with a confident smirk on his face. Gods, its a good thing we chose the lake shore as a practice area, else we would have undoubtedly attracted attention to us.

Thor help me, I have no choice right? I should probably get this over with.

As Astrid and Merida make their way towards me, I glare at them. 'You guys... owe me big time...'

Astrid just smirks as she passes me and sits next to Sandy, whispering 'Don't be too harsh on him, OK?'

Merida soon joins her and as I walk towards Jack, I can hear her shout 'KNOCK HIS FROSTY ASS OUT, HADDOCK!'

Sure, no pressure, right? It's not like I'm going to hurt my friend

or anything... why do people like fighting anyway?!

As I stand a few meters away of Jack, I've seen he's already taken a stance, legs open and hands at ready. 'C'mon, Hic, show me what you got!', he hollers, full of confidence.

I take a similar stance and Odin, I'm so nervous! It's a different kind of nervous from the usual I get whenever I sparred with kids on the village; this is a nervousness coming from fighting a friend. Not good.

We start circling each other slowly, and I use this time to study my opponent, like I've been told to do in my self-defense classes. OK, Jack looks very confident but his stance is actually too wide and shaky. He's undoubtedly stronger than me, even though he's gangly. That's actually an advantage to him; he's taller and he has more reach. So... if he manages to catch me I'm done. Great! My legendary clumsiness will surely help!

'C'mon Hic! Are you gonna attack or what?' says Jack, impatiently.

Nuh uh. I'm not taking the bait. I'm more of a retaliation guy. Countering and defense are... uh, my expertise I guess? I'll capitalize on my opponent's impatience and strike.

It's kinda funny how obvious his punch is, what with the obvious wind up, and I kinda feel bad when I side-step it easily. After evading the attack, I grab Jack's arm and as I step around him I bring it to his back. Before he can react, I put all my strength on a kick and I trip him up. Before long, Jack is on the floor, I pinning him to the ground with his arm on his back. I can hear him muttering some choice curse words and Merida's cheering voice reaches my ears.

...I... can't believe I actually managed to pull it off without messing up!

I get off from Jack's back hastily, and I offer him a hand to help him stand. 'Are you OK?'

'Pfft, what's with that face?', says Jack as he takes my hand and gets up, 'Relax Hic, I'm fine. I'll live!' he says as he dusts himself off and groans when he moves his arm. 'But seriously man, I shouldn't have underestimated you! That hurt a bit...'

I blush at the compliment, and I try to play down my achievement, 'I-I'm actually surprised I pulled it off...'

'You're selling yourself short, Hic. You did great.' says Jack with a carefree grin.

'I agree.', says Astrid who had walked towards us, a gentle smile on her face. 'Sure, your movements can always use improvement but you look like you knew what you were doing.'

'Oh man, I wish I had a camera! Seeing Overland getting his butt kicked by Hiccup was prizeless!', says Merida, snorting. Sandy is next to her, a drawing of me with a championship belt on his sketchbook, giving me a warm smile.



'Well, at least some of us are having fun.' I hear Jack mumble as he clutches the back of his head, hissing in pain slightly.

'No kidding.', Sure, it was nice to have won, but I didn't really enjoy it. And besides, I was still worried about Jack. He said it was nothing but he keeps grabbing the back of his head...

'So, up for another round?', said Merida, who obviously still wanted to see Jack getting floored.

'Ah, no, actually... I'm calling it quits right now... I'm tired and I...', I couldn't finish the sentence as I watched Jack fall to one knee, the teen clutching his head with both hands as if he were in pain.

'I'm... fine... guys... don't worry...!', he said as we surrounded him, obviously not buying his words. I knew it... I knew something was going to go wrong. Hiccup the Useless strikes again!

'We should get him to his cottage...', I say, but my suggestion isn't needed. Merida and Astrid are already lifting Jack up by his arms and carrying him away, Sandy and me following close by.

Worry gnaws at my gut as he passes out halfway to his cottage. When we arrive there, I hesitantly pull out his ElectroID from his hoodie pocket, and once we're inside, the girls plop him down in his bed. Jack's face looks peaceful, all things considered, and there aren't any external injuries from what I can tell but I'm still worried.

A firm hand on my shoulder grabs my attention and I see Astrid, who is smiling gently at me, completely at odds with her Ultimate Warrior persona. 'Relax Hiccup. He just passed out. He'll be fine.'

'Guess he couldn't handle all that raw vikingness of you...', says Merida with a low laugh.

At that crack, I smiled a bit. OK, he's going to be alright... you didn't kill him... this handsome idiot is still with us- and there goes my mind wandering again! Enough.

Returning my gaze to Jack's unconscious body, I worry again. 'Shouldn't we keep watch, though? Just in case...?'

Suddenly, Sandy's sketchbook appears in front of me, the words 'I'll do it! Leave it to me!' clearly written on them.

'Well, that settles it.', says Astrid as she walks to leave. 'C'mon Hiccup. He'll be fine and he's in good hands.' she finishes, urging me to leave.

Grudgingly, I wave at Sandy a goodbye and we leave Jack's cottage.

The girls suggest we pick up the sparring session where we left it but I'm not in the mood anymore, the accident with Jack draining me of energy. Merida and Astrid agree to let me go and as I make to leave, a knowing smirk is displayed on their faces, as if they know something I don't, but I'm too moody to care.

I cross the distance between Jack's and I's cottage and enter mine

with a dejected sigh. As I plop myself face down on my bed I grumble as I add Jack's well-being to my pile of ever growing worries.

Today was just a very rotten day.

\* \* \*

><p>I lay in there in my cottage for a few hours, wallowing in my worry. Worrying about everything. It's all I ever do these days. Before, I only worried about my own inadequacy and my role as a Dragon Trainer and my future as chief of the village. Now I have to worry if I'll make it out of here alive, if Toothless will be OK, if Jack will be OK...<p>

At his name, I stand up.

That's right... he wouldn't want me to just shut myself in my room... the asshole would probably want me to get out there and have some fun... Yeah...

The day is almost over, but I guess I should do something... anything to end the day in a high note...!

As I wander around the camp grounds aimlessly, I settle for entering the Lounge. Perhaps Rapunzel has returned the books she took...?

To my surprise, I find Flynn plopped down on a couch and reading a book. Talk about a jarring sight. The Ultimate Thief's is scrunched up in concentration as I approach him and he even jumps a bit as I greet him with a feeble 'Hi'. I guess he took my advice to heart.

Flynn's shocked expression melts away into an easy smile as he recognizes who I am, and he shoots a loud, 'Hey there!' before returning to his book. OK... I don't have anything against people educating themselves but I don't thin I'm alone in finding this behavior at odds with his personality... I'd think Flynn would rather steal gold than absorb knowledge.

Sitting down on a couch across him, ignoring the nervousness I'm getting from thinking if I'm intruding too much, I ask him. "What are you reading there?"

Looking up from his book, Flynn merely shrugs and says: "Oh... just... a tourist guide. Y'know, for great vacationing spots? Yeah."

Curioser and curioser.

"O-oh... I didn't take you for the tourist type...", I say truthfully.

Flynn looks up from his book again, and after pausing a little, closes it and puts it next to him as he focuses entirely on our conversation. "Well, kid, in my line of work, you kinda have to travel around a lot."

I can see that, but... "I-I'd think someone in your line of work wouldn't have the chance to relax in those vacationing spots..."

Flynn merely laughs at that. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

A silence falls between us as Flynn rests his chin on his hand, looking pensive as he looks at nothing in particular. Did I make things awkward? I know I shouldn't prod, but I'm curious... why is he looking at tourist spots if he knows he can't enjoy them?

As I shuffle in my seat, I gather up my courage and ask: "So... why? why look at them if you can't...?"

Flynn looks at me, arching an eyebrow as he studies me, probably wondering if he can trust me or not, before sighing. "I guess... I just realized how aimless my life has become..."

This is a surprise. I never expected confident, carefree Flynn Rider to have some self-doubt.

"What... do you mean?", I ask, testing my luck.

"What's it to ya, kid?", he asks with a deadpan look, before sighing, "Look, sorry kid, but I'm not in the mood to spill my feelings, OK? Had enough of that with Punzie...' he trails off.

I nod in understanding. I don't think anyone would spill their insecurities to a stranger that easily... well, anyone but me.

My gaze falls to the book Flynn was reading and I make a connection in my mind. Punzie... Punzel... Rapunzel... Book... spilling feelings?

"Did... Rapunzel... recommend that book to you-"

"Gotta go!", and before I know it, Flynn is making a mad dash to the door with the book on his hand, a flustered look on his face.

Flynn Rider, the Ultimate Thief. A charismatic individual to be sure, but his suave personality and jovial exterior hide something more. I wonder if I'll ever be able to see past his carefree exterior, but I guess a certain blonde has beaten me to it.

\* \* \*

><p>I barely am in my cottage when I hear that familiar buzz from the monitor. Sure enough, Monobear's face is being displayed. Like usual the bear makes the Night Time announcement before wishing us good night. As if anyone would have sweet dreams in a place like this.<p>

I briefly wonder what Monobear is plotting for us before a buzz in my pocket distracts me. I fish out my ElectroID and I find a message from Sandy.

"Jack is awake, but is still very dizzy! Needs a good night's rest! So don't bother him! I'm leaving him, cannot sleep in his cottage, rules!"

I smile at the palpable excitement in Sandy's message. Jack is OK! I sigh in relief before smacking myself mentally. Of course, he would be OK. I was just being a worrywart, like always.

Still, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't happy. I send Sandy a brief thanks and good night message before showering. I let the water wash away my worries as I think about my friend. It's such a small thing, but I guess even the slightest positive thing is enough to lift my spirits.

Things are far from OK, but as I finish showering and I dress myself to sleep, I feel hope growing inside me. Tomorrow is going to be a new day. Tomorrow we're going to have our breakthrough, we'll find a way out I'm sure! And Jack will be there.

And for some reason, that helps me ease into a calm sleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- MONOBEAR THEATER -<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Huuuuh? You worship superheroes?"<p>

"Why?"

"Superheroes are special, powerful, good-looking and all around well liked by everyone. They're successful in life and almost always win. They have riches and glory and they always get the girl, save the day and beat the villain. They know nothing about life's ordeals, of the struggles of the loser, of the everyday man and woman who struggle to live by."

"There is no reason to root for those perfect beings! We should root for ourselves, the losers. We should root for the villains!"

## 9. 1 - Chapter 1 - Normal Lives D

**\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - Normal Days  
D\*\***

**\*\*Jack's POV\*\***

Darkness.

It's kinda funny how familiar it has become to me. Darkness surrounds me, myself and my memories or lack of thereof.

However, this darkness I'm currently submerged in is different. Sure, it gives me a sense of unease, but I can feel something else.

In a flash, the darkness around me subsides, only to reveal what I was sensing a few moments ago; pure, unadulterated terror.

In front of my eyes lies a frozen lake. The lake's pristine frozen beauty has been disturbed, the center of it featuring a hole, a crack. No matter how much I try, I can't peel my eyes off from it and yet looking at this hole fills me with such dread, such fear. I know. There's something in there, something I feel I'm forgetting. Something I don't want to remember. Because not knowing is better. And yet...

And yet... I... cannot ignore. Ignorance cannot give me bliss. And even still, I cannot remember! Cannot remember what... who fell through the ice...! An abstract, unknown fear... fear of something lost... an abstract kind of feel.

The scene shifts and the lake moves away from me, and despite how much I try to chase after it, my limbs don't respond. Why? Why can't I move?! And why am I trying to chase after something that fills me with fear?!

A few moments pass and I find myself running. But I'm not running in a carefree manner, like when I'm playing around with my sister... no, this run... I can feel the tension, the adrenaline running through my body. I'm running for my life. Why?

The scene becomes clearer. I'm running through a street in a city. The street is a mess, cracked and singed, the pieces of loose concrete embedding themselves on my bare feet and yet the pain is barely recognized in my mind, for I can't, WON'T, stop running. There's cars tipped over and crashed, most of them empty from those that managed to escape, some of them still housing unfortunate souls who couldn't. But escape from who? The same thing I'm running from?

A loud explosion behind me spurs me to run faster. All around me, skyscrapers and buildings are catching fire, collapsing onto themselves. I do not stop to look at them. There is nothing to be done for them.

Where am I running to? Is there any place safe in this hell? There must be... It's just a few paces away... what is a few paces away?

I become conscious of the fact that I'm not running alone when I hear something... someone... fall behind me with a gasp. I turn around to see a small boy, no, teen, lying on the ground, trying to get up. His auburn mop of hair barely conceals his face as he gets up, his green, forest like eyes full of fear, freckles barely visible under the soot on his face. He's obviously tired, sweat running down his face.

"Jack... I'm not gonna make it...", he says, his face devoid of hope.

At that, I snap. No. He's gonna survive. He HAS to survive. He's the last thing I have. He... is the most important thing in my life right now. He has to survive!

'C'mon Hiccup! We're almost there, just a little more!". I try to encourage him, but it's mostly me trying to convince myself.

Hiccup just shakes his head, his eyes dull, devoid of any life. "No... I, Jack... I'm just going to slow you down... save yourself, please."

Absolutely not. I'm tired... tired of what? I just know I can't lose him. Lose anyone. Not anymore. I grab his hand and force him to run with me, though I can tell from his labored breathing that he won't last long. A few moments pass and after running up a hill, I see it. The last safe haven in this mad world; Hope's Peak Academy.

Hiccup and I share a hopeful smile. We're gonna survive. We just have to run and reach it and we'll be safe!

A roar snaps us out of our contentment and we make a run for it. I can see the doors now, and I can see some people waiting for us, to welcome us inside!

Everything goes wrong. An earthquake knocks us all to our feet. As I lift my face to get a better view at the school, I can see the figure of Monobear, however, he now easily dwarfs the school. He lifts an enormous black paw and with great force, he smashes Hope's Peak Academy. Debris falls upon us and I can feel Hiccup being grabbed from my grasp, his terrified screams making my heart ache. Before I can do anything, darkness surrounds me once again and the accursed laugh of the Headmaster surrounds me, refusing to let go.

I wake up with a start, screaming and bathed in sweat.

It takes me a few minutes to compose myself, to notice that I'm in my cottage. A dream? No, more like a nightmare. And yet it felt so real...

A tap on my shoulders startles me, but I calm myself when I notice it's Sandy, his smile calm despite me probably scaring the lights out of him with my scream.

It is then that I realize that I have no idea how I ended up here.

"Uh... Sandy... how did I...?", I prod, but before I can finish, Sandy's already written out his response on his sketchbook.

"You passed out after sparring and we brought you here to rest.", he writes, with a smile.

Wow, talk about making a fool of myself.

Before I can speak, Sandy's already writing out another query.

"Are you alright? Wanna talk about?", he asks, his brow furrowed in obvious worry.

Am I alright? Truth be told, I am not. Do I want to talk about it? I don't know... but then again, Sandy is the Ultimate Dream Interpreter... and I do like him.

I tell everything about my dream to Sandy, who listens without interrupting, his gaze focused entirely on me. He only nods and writes stuff down on his sketchbook. As I finish telling him about it, and after pausing a bit so I can catch my breath, I ask him: "So... what do you think?"

Sandy purses his lips, deep in thought, before writing down something on his sketchbook, before showing it to me.

"It seems to me like your harboring a troubled past. A memory you're not happy with. A memory you hate so much that you forced yourself to forget."

He changes pages and writes out more.

"But even though you consciously don't remember it, your subconscious does. Hence the nightmare. I am not sure if the contents of your nightmare have to do with the memory itself, but the unifying theme of your dream makes the nature of your memory clear to me."

I look at Sandy with confusion. "What do you mean 'theme'?"

Sandy smiles warmly, before writing down his response.

"It's loss, Jack. You're afraid of losing people. Your lost memory may have to do with it, hence why you're afraid of losing anyone."

I... guess its true... even now, I'm afraid of losing myself with my memory loss and... I'm afraid of losing Hiccup. Is that why he appeared in my dream? But I can't help but think there's something more to that nightmare... it felt so real...

I sigh. "What should I do, Sandy?"

Sandy closes his eyes, deep in thought, before diving once again into his sketchbook. His response can be seen.

"In the end, it will be up to you, Jack. When you finally remember, you'll have to come to terms with the memory, and face your fear. Only then, will you be able to put that behind you."

"But, rest assured." he continues, with a bright smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes, "You will not be alone. I'll be here for you to help you with that. I'm sure Hiccup will help you too."

At that, my face heats up a bit. "Wh-what do you mean by th-", but he interrupts me with a wave of his hand, laughing silently. His sketchbook reads: "I'm mute, not blind, Jack. I can see you both are very close, 4 days of knowing each other notwithstanding. I'm glad you found a friend. It makes this situation more bearable."

He smiles at me again before bringing out his ElectroID, typing out a message. His sketchbook once again displays more of his words. "I just told him you're awake but that you need to rest. I'm sure that will ease his worries a bit."

Of course. I'm sure that dork is worrying himself to death, thinking it was his fault.

"I must be going. Can't sleep here or else the Headmaster will throw a fit.", the sketchbook display once again and Sandy makes to leave.

Before he can leave, I call out to him, "Uh, Sandy!", he turns around to see me, a quizzical look on his face. "Thanks, for everything. Really.", I say, grinning sincerely. Sandy returns the favor and leaves with a bow.

As he leaves, I set myself down on my bed again, much more at ease. Sure, I'm still worried about everything that is me and my memory and learning that I have a troubled past isn't certainly reassuring... but what is reassuring is the fact that I'm not alone in this. That I

have friends who will support me... yes, I'm sure they will. Especially he. That little Viking might act tough but I can see his caring nature. I truly am grateful that he talked to me back then.

Yes, just the fact that I have friends now fills me with hope. And its in this state of reassuring hope that I drift back to sleep, this time without any afflicting nightmares.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Phew. <strong>

\*\*Character building is exhausting, but we're getting there.\*\*

\*\*As usual, reviews are welcome. Until next time!\*\*

## 10. 1 - Chapter 1 - Normal Lives E

\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - Normal Days E\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Woo! It's been a while, hasn't it? So sorry about that. I guess you guys will forgive me with this? Another double update, yessir!<strong>

\*\*And this one is extra large, to boot! Though after reading this... you may end up hating me? I dunno, but hey! Enjoy!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Hiccup's POV<span>  
><strong>

Thump.

I hear something in my sleep, distant, but noticeable. I try to ignore it though, since this is the first time in days that I've had a good night's rest.

Thump. Thump.

Whatever that noise is, its coming from above me. Is it Monobear? But why would he resort to doing this when his morning announcements are far more noisy and effective?

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Still... this sound... is familiar. I've heard this sound, yes... I know who makes this sound... there's only one being in existence who wakes me up this way... that scaly bud of min-

With a start, I open my eyes and I sit up in my bed, waiting for the sound again. I wasn't dreaming, was I? C-could it be...? Is it really...?!

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.



"Toothless!", I shout, realization dawning on me, excitement filling my body. With a swiftness I didn't know I had in me, I put on a green t-shirt with Hope's Peak Academy's logo (it was either that or one with Monobear's face), some skinny jeans and my shoes and I exit my cottage. I feel a giant smile on my face as I look at the roof of my cottage, trying to see the familiar figure of my dragon friend.

It happens so quickly that I barely have time to react. I'm knocked down by a black figure from above, but I'm not afraid, because a few moments later I can feel the snout of my friend, nuzzling me, followed by that giant tongue of his, bathing me in saliva that doesn't wash out. But I can't even be mad, not even at the dragon breath that is assaulting my nostrils. Because Toothless, my friend, my bud... is here! He's back and he's OK!

"I... missed you, too bud!", I manage to say between laughs and his assaults of affection. He can't talk but I can sense he missed me too. I can see it on his big, green eyes, full of emotion, of happiness. And that's how I feel too. Happy. Relieved. I get up from the floor and I give Toothless a big hug. I... really... really missed him so much. There are no words that can truly express that. And there's no need for such words either, as we stay like that, me giving him a hug, afraid that if I let go he will vanish... and him just staying still, purring and resting his head on my tiny shoulder.

"Am I... interrupting something?"

A familiar, deep voice interrupts the moment, but the smile in my face doesn't falter. I turn around, and sure enough, Jack is standing there, smiling but noticeably nervous, his eyes darting between me and Toothless.

He's OK. Toothless is OK. These facts being true fill me with such relief. But I guess this isn't the time.

I can feel Toothless stiffening and growling, and I can see Jack is about ready to bolt. Right, I should... introduce these two.

I put myself in between them and I take a deep breath. Right, I can do this.

I put a hand on Toothless' snout and I keep eye contact, trying to gauge my bud's feelings by looking at them. I can see distrust, as he eyes this stranger. "It's alright bud. Easy... he's a friend." I say in a soothing voice, rubbing Toothless's head. I can see my bud's eyes moving between me and Jack, those green, expressive orbs of his, and after processing my words, I can see his pupils dilate a bit. Good, he's still wary but now he's willing to listen. Toothless's stance is less tense too. So far, so good...

I move towards Jack now, who's face is a weird mixture of fear and awe and I only slightly hesitate a bit before grabbing his wrist. At this, he looks at me with a bit of panic in his face, realizing what I'm going to do.

"Uh... Hic... I-I'm not so sure I want to-"

I snort at the quivering in his voice, "Relax, you big baby. Toothless is totally harmless!"

He scowls as I slowly pull him towards my bud, who's eyeing us curiously. "There's nothing harmless about a flying, fire-breathing lizard..."

I roll my eyes. "Dragons aren't just flying, fire-breathing lizards, Jack." We're near Toothless now, and I stop a few paces away from him, moving away from Jack just a little. "Dragons are smart. They can understand you. Which is why the first step to befriending a dragon is showing it that they can trust you."

I can see the doubt in Jack's face, eyeing my Night Fury friend with fear. "A-are you sure I'll be OK?"

I nod at him. "I'm definitely sure. Now...", I once again grab Jack's wrist and move it slowly towards Toothless' snout, "Relax. Don't be afraid. Approach him slowly. He'll accept you if you do as I tell you."

Despite what I'm saying, the atmosphere is tense. This is a very important moment, and while I truly wish for Toothless and Jack to be friends, it's all up to them. I watch closely as Jack closes the distance slowly, gulping so hard that his Adam's apple visibly bobbles. He's a few inches away from touching Toothless before he stops for a bit, sighing deeply, and then he closes his eyes before proceeding, looking visibly more calmer. I nod mostly to myself, remembering that I did the same thing back when I met Toothless.

Said dragon is merely staring at Jack without moving, though I can tell Toothless already trusts Jack. How can I tell? Well, Toothless just rolled his eyes at me after Jack closed his eyes. Yep, I did say this dragon had an attitude, but his heart is in the right place. I think he trusted Jack already back when I said that he was a friend, but I suppose Toothless just wanted to put the white haired idiot through this small test. Typical Toothless.

I shake my head at my bud, in clear disapproval and he just snorts before turning back to Jack, eyeing the whittette's outstretched hand. Toothless looks at it for a few seconds before he closes the distance himself, bringing his snout towards Jack's hand, who visibly flinches. Opening his eyes slowly, Jack gasps a little, before smiling at the fact that a dragon has accepted him and Gods, his smile is so bright and full of genuine happiness. With more confidence, Jack proceeds to pet Toothless in the head, who purrs back in contentment, and while he does so he slowly looks at the dragon in front of him, his blue eyes glittering with wonder.

He looks over to me, his face alight with happiness, before saying in a breathless voice, "Hic, this is amazing.", he turns his attention to Toothless before saying, "He's amazing."

I silently agree. If it weren't for Toothless... I'd probably be a different person than who I am today, for the worse. Saying he's amazing is nothing but short of the truth. I walk towards them and I also start petting my bud, whose purrs just get louder.

"Don't tell him that too much, though, or else his head will get bigger", I say jokingly. Toothless just looks at me with the dragon equivalent of a deadpan look before burping in my face. Ah, the

wretched, rotting smell of dragon breath... how I missed it.  
Not.

Jack obviously bursts into a fit of hysterics, leaning on Toothless for support without any fear now. "I-I guess... someone is hungry...!", he manages to say between laughs.

At that, Toothless instantly perks up, his frills standing up with attention. Well, it is time for breakfast, I guess. "Hopefully they serve fish in the morning..." I say as I start scratching Toothless behind his frills.

"Fish?", asks Jack.

"Yeah, Toothless loves it. Can't get enough of it, can you bud?" I say and Toothless just nods his head earnestly, showing that loveable gummy smile of his that earned him his name.

"Well, now I can see why you named him Toothless... not gonna lie, Hic. I was expecting razor sharp teeth." says Jack as he keeps looking at Toothless with wonder and amusement.

"Oh, he has teeth, but they're retractable." I answer before I start walking towards the restaurant, motioning to my bud to follow me, "Now, come on. Everyone's waiting."

At that, Jack's smile drops. "Everyone?", he quickly catches up to me, "You're going to show Toothless to them?"

"They already know about him, Jack. It's better if everyone knows about him now..." at that, I pause. 'Everyone...?', aren't we missing... somebody?

"Hey, Jack... where are Sandy, Merida and Astrid?", I say as we stop just shy of entering the REC area.

Jack snaps his fingers as if he has just remembered something, "Oh, that's right! They didn't send you an IM?", I shake my head in denial. Jack shows me his ElectroID with an IM from Merida.

"Jack, pick up hiccup for us will ya? astrid and i are going to spar for a bit before breakfast so we're gonna have to bail n your plan. sandy will be our ref so hes coming too. take care of hiccup and don't get any funny ideas with him ya hear? ;)"

Oh great. The heat is returning to my cheeks. Thanks, Merida.

"Strange girl, that Mer." says Jack as he pockets his ElectroID hastily after Toothless displays an interest on it. "Really, fighting so early in the morning? Without eating? I don't get those two."

"Y-yeah... you can say that again...". Crud. Did Merida realize I have a slight crush on Jack? Where do I sign up for murder land? I want to be the first.

"Ah well, I'm sure they'll be thrilled to meet Toothless", says Jack with a shrug. "Maybe, if we get lucky, Toothless will eat Snotlout." He says with a mischievous smile.

"Jack, please don't feed trash to my friend", I deadpan.

The Ultimate Mystery just snickers before continuing. "I'm just saying, Hic! I feel good about having a dragon on our side! Hell, I bet we can easily fly over that fence and escape!"

I have to agree, having Toothless on our side is reassuring, at least for me it is. I fondly look at my friend before I notice his crestfallen mood. Why is Toothless sad?

It doesn't take me long to realize why Toothless is sad. Of course, Monobear just wasn't going to give us hope without spreading some despair. He wasn't just going to return Toothless to me in one piece.

I barely can hear Jack asking me what's wrong. I can't formulate an answer, the words just won't come out. A knot in my throat prevents all words from leaving, so I simply point at Toothless' tail.

Toothless' tail is missing a fin. A flash of memory flickers briefly to my eyes; Toothless' tail being bloody and missing a tail fin after crashing through the school walls. Without that fin, Toothless will never be able to fly again.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I wasn't blind. I'm not sure if people thought of me like this back when I still had a memory, but I like to think I'm not stupid either.

I mean, it was easy to tell that Hiccup had never looked so happy, well, ever! Toothless' return simply brought this... spark to his eyes, the green on them shining brightly! His smiles became more sincere, and his face just was... more bright. None of it was forced... it was fascinating to look at.

Which is why I was so bothered right now, as we ate breakfast with everyone, that Hiccup had returned to the previous forced-smiles-and-optimism mode.

Hiccup's genuine happiness disappeared back then, when he noticed that Toothless was missing something. I... don't understand what that missing tail fin means, but I don't want to ask... the look on Hiccup's face was so unlike anything I had seen before, so at odds with his previous mood, that I didn't have the courage to ask.

It was bothering me that no one else had noticed how Hiccup was acting, but then again, no one but me had seen his genuine side. I did see Sandy looking at him with a probing gaze but he stopped after a while.

Well, I guess I can always ask Hic later. Right now, I'm sure he doesn't want to talk about this in front of everyone.

Speaking of which, I have been neglecting my plate of eggs and bacon. I dig in with gusto and so, breakfast carries out as usual.

Well, not really. Though the restaurant isn't exactly quiet, it is more subdued than yesterday. A sense of gloom floats all over us... and I think I know why.

Suddenly, Nick claps his hands, and as usual, everyone jumps at the call for attention. Nodding once he sees everyone is looking at him, Nick speaks: "Well... there is various things we have to discuss today, so let us start with the first."

Nick starts pacing in circles in his place, his hand rubbing his chin as he speaks: "I realize we have not... been entirely successful in the... 'finding a way out' front..."

"It's been a waste of time", says Snotlout with a glare.

"Yes, well...", says Nick as he silences Snotlout with his hand, "I think we need to change our tactics and search methods. So today we are going to search-"

"Oh, it's no use!", interrupts Fishlegs, whinnying. "Let's just accept it, guys! There's no way out! I'm 100% sure Monobear thought about everything!"

"So, what, mate? You suggestin' we give up?", asks Bunny confrontationally.

At that, Fishlegs jumps in his seat, scared, before sighing exasperatedly. "Look! I'm just saying... it's not so bad in here, OK? I... certainly wouldn't mind staying...", says Fishlegs as he trails off, his eyes looking at the floor.

Bunny just looks at Fishlegs, incredulous, before huffing and saying "Fine then! But I ain't giving up, ya hear me? I will keep lookin'! That's what ya wanted to say, right, North?!"

Nick nods in appreciation, but before he can get another word, Anna jumps up from her seat and interrupts, "Don't fight, guys! Everything is going to be OK! I'm sure we will be rescued soon!"

Everyone looks at her now, our attention obviously caught.

"What... do you mean?", asks Pitch.

"Well... it's been almost 4 days since we've been kidnapped, right? Someone is bound to notice, right? So they're probably looking for us! I'm sure the police is gonna find us soon enough!", says Anna with a bright smile on her face.

But before we can any hope from this suggestion, that annoying, boisterous cartoony laugh fills the restaurant once more.

Standing on the table, appearing out of thin air somehow, is Monobear, still laughing. We all jump a bit at his sudden appearance, and I can tell Hiccup isn't happy to see our Headmaster. I am not entirely jolly either.

"The police? Really? Are you trusting those low level goons with your life? They're the first to go down in those action movies for a reason, you know? They're useless!", says Monobear, sneering at Anna,

who has a terrified stare as she sinks back to her seat. "Weak! That kind of hope is too weak! You're all so weak and boring, it's driving me to tears!", says the monochromatic bear as he rambles on.

"What do you want?!", shouts Astrid.

At that, Monobear turns to her, his face nonchalant, "Well, I sure could go for a tuna sandwich right now, but that's not why I'm here. I was just going to ask why you haven't killed each other yet. I mean, it's obvious some of you are desperate to escape and yet nothing has happened! To be honest, I'm bored. Despairfully bored. Utterly so."

At that, we all tense. Is he... trying to goad us to kill? I look at Hiccup from the corner of my eye and I can see he's shaking a little. At that sight, I glare at the Headmaster.

I slowly unclench my jaw and I manage to spit my words at the bear in front of me as angrily as I can: "We will never... kill each other! We have no reason to-"

Monobear interrupts me by pounding a fist on his palm, "Ohhhh So that's it! Man, I feel so silly now... Of course, I was forgetting something!"

Everyone looks at the bear, unsure of what he meant.

"What are you talking about?" asks Tooth, wary.

"Y'know... I was just wondering why no one had killed anyone after I was generous enough to provide a suitable set of characters and a setting befitting of an A+ mystery story... and I've realized I haven't given you a motive for you guys!"

"Rest assured, I'll cook up a nice motive for you guys later! You can look forward to it later today! After all, no one wants to see teenagers living in peace and happiness. So don't worry! The motive I'll give you guys is going to be to kill for. Puhuhuhuhuhu!"

And with that giggle and bleak promise, the Headmaster vanished into thin air, leaving us befuddled and worried.

Flynn breaks the awkward silence, "So, uh... what does he mean by motive...?"

"It is just Monobear trying to scare us." says Nick, dismissing the issue with a wave of his hand, as if he could wave off the whole incident away. But I can't help but feel like there's something else at work here... There's this sinking feeling in my stomach.

"Now then... on the next topic of our discussion...", continues the Ultimate Sculptor, "I know there are lots of... uncertainties in our situation..."

It's true. There are a lot of mysteries... things we don't understand.

Who is Monobear?

Who is controlling him?

What are his goals?

Why us?

Is he really affiliated with Hope's Peak Academy?

What's this place anyway? Where are we?

And then... there's me. Why can't I remember anything? Why only me? There's a lot of things we don't understand about our situation...

"And I also noticed this has been affecting our morale, so to speak...", Nick's voice snaps me out of my reverie, "So...! Tooth here came up with a brilliant idea!", and after saying that, Nick gestures to the Ultimate Dentist to speak.

Tooth is flustered to be the center of attention, but her enthusiasm is still visible. "Well, it's just like North said! I've noticed you guys aren't really cheery right now, and I understand that... especially with that bear... but a high morale is of great importance in these situations so... I've planned an event to cheer us up!"

Everyone is looking at the rainbow-haired girl with interest now. Tooth takes this as a signal to continue. "Everyone is familiar with the lake, right?" a few mumbled 'yeahs' can be heard. "Well, I was thinking... how about we all throw a party at the shore later?"

At this, only silence could be heard. Of course, it didn't last long.

"Wait, what do you mean, 'party?'," asked Hiccup, who spoke up for the first time on the day.

"Well, a party consists of a leisurely reunion where individuals get together to celebrate something usually over food and drink-"

"I know what a party is, Fishlegs." Interrupts Hiccup, shutting the blonde boy's ramble. "What I meant is... why a party of all things?"

At that, Tooth blushes a bit from excitement. "Well, I just thought we needed to unwind, you know? We've been locked up and we've been stressing ourselves a lot so... I just thought a party would be nice."

"I agree with Tooth", I say with a smile. "We all need a break, no? Besides it sounds like fun!". Well, I don't know how parties usually go but this one sounded like fun and I wasn't going to miss this chance to experience one.

"What do yer have in mind, Tooth?" asks Merida, looking actually interested.

"I was planning a normal, swimming party... I actually hoped you guys would help me to come up with some ideas...", said the Ultimate Dentist.

"There's, uh, just one problem... We don't have swimsuits, remember?", said Hiccup with one finger raised.

"You don't have to worry about that. They sell them at the supermarket.", said Astrid as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Yeah, though Monobear has questionable fashion sense...", said Rapunzel grumbling.

"I'm suddenly more interested in this party...", said Flynn with a sly smile on his face.

"E-even so-", interjected Hiccup but he was interrupted by the twins.

"Like, we could make fireworks. Y'know. It's not very exciting but we can totally do that.", said Tuff in a disinterested voice.

"We can organize the games and competitions!", said Astrid excited. I shuddered inwardly, remembering their sparring session.

"Hmm... I guess I can sculpt some nice trophies for that... Yes...", said Nick, thinking out loud.

Slowly, but surely, the restaurant was getting filled with excitement at the prospect of the party, everyone coming up with ideas; a water balloon fight hosted by Aster, scary stories by Pitch near the camp fire, even Hiccup agreed to cook hamburgers for us reluctantly, with Anna eagerly providing her assistance.

For some reason, that bothered me a bit... but I was too enveloped in the excitement of the party that I forgot about it.

In the end, we decided to start the party at 4 PM. We all got ready to depart the restaurant in high spirits, with Monobear's threat all but forgotten, when suddenly Hiccup spoke up.

"H-hey, guys... before we leave... I wanted to ask you all something", he said, nervousness obviously filling his words, his hands moving in all directions as he spoke.

"I-I wanted to ask if my bud, Toothless, could come to the party too...", said the Ultimate Lucky Student as he trailed off. Ah, I had forgotten about the dragon entirely! Yeah, he was waiting outside the restaurant but we had to introduce him to all of them sooner or later.

"Toothless? What kind of stupid name is that?", said Snotlout. Man, I really hope Toothless does eat him. And doesn't he realize the irony of his question?

"Well, there's no reason to be nervous about that, Hiccup. Of course your friend can come. Why did you even have to ask?", said Tooth warmly.

"Whoa, hold on a sec.", said Flynn. "We're the only ones here, so who is this 'friend of yours'?"

Hesitation clearly filled Hiccup's face as everyone looked at him



expectantly. Finally, the auburn haired viking spoke up. "W-well... he's not actually... human! He's... my friend... dragon... yeah!".

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"You're kidding, right?", said Flynn, clearly unconvinced.

"No, wait, but I clearly remember something back then when Monobear first appeared..." said Nick.

"Now that you mention it.." Elsa's voice trailed off.

"So I wasn't dreaming that!? Dragons are real?", asked Fishlegs incredulously

"Of course they are! You saw one and you still doubt it? But more importantly, where is he, Hiccup?", said Merida excited.

"Yeah, its about time you showed him to us.", agreed Astrid.

I couldn't help but feel a little sorry for all the attention the little Viking was receiving so I walked over to stand next to him and gave him a reassuring pat. "C'mon Hic. It's show time."

Hiccup just looked at me with a half-glare, but he smiled nonetheless. Gulping audibly, Hiccup nodded before stepping forward, with me following closely, motioning everyone to follow him. "He's outside... this way... c-come on..."

As expected, everyone's reaction to the dragon was unique. One by one, Hiccup introduced everyone to Toothless, who was incredibly cautious around such a big group of people. But slowly, he befriended everyone and soon enough, they were getting along with the Night Fury just as good.

Well, there were a few who didn't exactly get along with Toothless. Snotlout predictably got bitten by Toothless but even though Hiccup reprimanded the dragon, I could tell he wasn't entirely sorry that the accident happened.

Elsa was incredibly wary of him and refused to even touch the dragon.

Surprisingly, Toothless was afraid of Pitch, but the Ultimate Fear Expert was apparently very fond of the creature.

Astrid and Merida were in absolute love with the creature, petting him and calling it cute names. I also learned that making fun of them because of it was hazardous to my health. Damn... I'm gonna get a bruise in my rib cage...

Sandy and Rapunzel were in awe of the Night Fury, and soon enough they tried to sketch him. Toothless got a kick out of it by posing proudly with his head held high and his chest sticking out.

Nick and Bunny were eyeing the saddle on Toothless and admiring the dragon's wings. When Bunny asked if Hiccup rode Toothless, the Ultimate Lucky Student got visibly sad, saying that he used to do so, but now it was impossible. As he said that, he pointed at the Night Fury's tail and I suddenly understood why Hiccup had gotten sad a few hours ago. Of course he would get sad about this...

Tooth and Anna were also very excited to meet a real, bona fide dragon, and they were very daring around him. Tooth even went as far as putting her hands inside the Night Fury's mouth in order to study his teeth. I laughed out loud when the Night Fury looked at Hiccup as if he was pleading for help.

The twins were obviously delighted at the prospect of a fire breathing creature and when they asked for a demonstration of his fire power, Flynn boldly suggested Snotlout for target practice. Said Ultimate Heavy Lifter ran as he heard the suggestion but incredibly so, Toothless managed to hit him with a small plasma blast, to the delight of the twins. Fishlegs announced impressed that the Night Fury had managed to hit Snotlout at a distance of 100 meters.

After spending a few more moments with the dragon, everyone agreed to let the Night Fury come to the party and everyone disbanded to get ready. I walked over to Hiccup who was smiling as he gave the scaly goof a rub on his chin, and as I leaned on him playfully, I said. "See? They love him. No need to worry."

I almost missed Hiccup's blush when he looked at me and I had to remind myself that the kid, despite being sarcastic, was actually not big on physical contact. But for some reason, I enjoyed seeing that blush. Hiccup shrugged me off and even though his cheeks were red, he managed to roll his eyes and say in that sarcastic nasally voice of his: "Yeah, they love him more than you already."

"Hic, you just keep wounding me. You're such a bully!", I said playfully in retort, falling back into our usual routine.

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><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

I managed to shake Jack off after convincing him that I was OK and that I had to get ready for the party, and that he needed to get ready as well. Well, he didn't actually get a role but he needed to get a swimsuit and there was no way I was going to help him decide which swimsuit to wear. My mind was already wandering towards dangerous territory and I didn't need the visual aid to fuel my delusional fantasies.

I guess I have resigned myself to the fact that yes, I got a crush on this frosty twig of a person. Way to go, Haddock.

No time for summer romances, though. I had to get ready as well... I needed to get a swimsuit AND the ingredients for making hamburgers. Not only that, I was also wary of Monobear and his whole 'motive' speech. What did he mean...?

Still, the guys were right. These past days have been absolutely brutal and a party... true, I'm not a party person but this is better than just walking around aimlessly and staying in our cottages.

With Toothless' help, I managed to carry a small refrigerator to my cottage and after that we got all the ingredients and cooking utensils needed for preparing Dad's famous Haddock hamburger recipe. Toothless was actually very eager to help... I guess he really was tired of not being able to move.

My mind once again wandered towards Toothless' missing tail fin and the fact that he wouldn't be able to fly... and I felt cold inside. "A downed dragon is a dead dragon"... those words drifted to my mind. I felt my eyes sting with the feeling of unfairness at Toothless' situation. I knew he loved to fly more than anything and now...

I felt a bump in my back and when I turned around to see who it was, I saw my bud looking at me with a worried expression. Right... this wasn't the time to get moody. Toothless was trying his best to not let this get to him and I wasn't going to be the one that was going to ruin the mood. Besides, there might be a way to fix this... That's right... Toothless had done a lot for me over the years and just giving up on him was not an option... "Perhaps I can... But I need materials..." I mumbled to myself as I started moving towards the supermarket once again, the gears in my mind shifting into overdrive as ideas filled my brain.

It took me another nudge from Toothless to realize that I had walked into the supermarket without seeing where I was going and that I had ended in the shoe aisle. What surprised me, though, was the fact that I wasn't alone. A familiar blonde braid and warrior outfit... Yep, Astrid was here. Toothless' size probably alerted her to our presence, 'cause she noticed us and walked over to us, a relaxed grin on her face.

"Hey, Hiccup. How's the burger preparations going?"

"Oh, I'm done with that. I just need to get my swimsuit.", I said as I eyed a pair of sandals on display.

Astrid simply laughed. "Well, the clothing section is over there, Berkian Warrior. I take it you have no sense of direction?"

I got nailed. "F-for your information, I am actually an accomplished cartographer...! And what is this? I thought the whole Berkian Warrior deal was over...!", I said, gesturing every word with my hands.

"Sure, sure. It's just funny to tease you... Jack was right about that.", said the blonde, waving her hand dismissively. Gods, I'm gonna get even with that guy one day...

"So, what about you, Astrid? Are you done preparing for the party?", I asked, trying to move on.

"Oh yeah. Got that done already. I'm actually looking for shoes.", she said as she tapped her boots with her right hand. "Wearing these every day is kinda tiring so I'm getting something more appropriate for the party."

I nodded. That makes sense. Pulling Toothless away from the leather boots he was smelling, I walked away. "Well, I'll leave you to that... I still need to get a proper attire."

Astrid's voice echoed down the halls as she shouted at me. "Try to not pick something daring or Jack is gonna die!"

Thor Almighty strike me down right now because I'm gonna die from embarrassment. Was I really that obvious? Please don't answer that.

\* \* \*

><p>After finding a pair of green swimming trunks with a dragon print on the left leg (yes I was a dragon fan thoroughly) and a simple white tank top, I returned to my cottage. The day was going by faster than I expected but it was probably because of my excitement. These past days, I had nothing to look forward to, but today was different. Yes, despite my doubts, I was looking towards the party. It was a nice, different feeling, being included into a group of people who weren't going to judge. Back in Berk, parties were full of putting fronts in order to impress my relatives. But here... I could discard that facade and be myself.<p>

I felt free.

Well, as free as you can be in a prison wardened by a robotic bear, but you know what I meant.

Toothless slept in a corner of my cottage peacefully. I was surprised he actually fit through all the doors in this place, as if they were designed with him in mind... Strange...

My hand picked up my swimming trunks from my bed, along with the tank top. It was time for the party and I had to change. Walking over to the bathroom, I changed way faster than normal and as I was about to leave, I caught the design of the dragon on my trunks on the bathroom mirror and I had to gasp.

The dragon on my trunks was a Terrible Terror. An actual dragon species.

"But... how...?"

What I was seeing was impossible. No one knew dragons existed. It was a secret of Berk. So how... did Monobear get these trunks' design?

Just... who is Monobear?

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><p>The walk towards the lake was quiet, my excitement concealed under what I hoped was a poker face. For some reason, I still feared to show how happy I truly was. Well, the reason wasn't that much of a mystery; I was too self-conscious of my face... and apparently my smiles had the tendency of showing my crooked teeth and yeah... I didn't want anyone to see that. I was already not pleasant to look at to begin with...<p>

A creak on my left snapped me out of my self-deprecatative tirade. Toothless totally lunged ahead of me, pulling the cooler where all the cooking ingredients and utensils were stored behind himself. The

big goof was bouncing excitedly at the sight of the lake, and I had to rush towards him to unclip the cooler from his saddle before the dragon decided to plunge into the water, food be damned.

I smiled as Toothless jumped into the lake, his green eyes shining with excitement and his tongue hanging out of a corner of his mouth before the Night Fury decided to explore the depths of the lake.

"Looks like someone is excited"

I had to jump at the silky, smooth voice of Peter came behind me. The Ultimate Fear Expert was wearing the same clothes he wore every day. Odd... he wasn't going to swim?

"Y-yeah... he likes the water as much as he like flying...", I said, stuttering. Truth be told, I still wasn't comfortable with Peter. His presence and probing gaze gave me chills.

"I see", was all he said before moving away from me. I could still feel his gaze from under the shadow of the tree he was sitting on, though, as I set up the grill and the ingredients on the folding table I had brought. Man, such a cheery atmosphere. I dunno about you, but having a creepy guy like him staring at you was definitely not my definition of fun.

"Already setting up everything Hiccup? Nice!", said North in that booming voice of his. Surprisingly, he was wearing diving suit, though the red color of it wasn't that surprising.

"Nice to see someone here is responsible enough...", said Aster, his gray tank top and white swimming trunks matching his silver hair.

"Ohh! You look adorable Hiccup!", said Tooth, her rainbow-like hair noticeable pushing her way inbetween the two males, wearing an equally colorful onepiece and...

"You brought your labcoat...?", I asked, obviously shocked.

"She wouldn't take it off no matter what...", said Aster while he shook his head. "Hope she enjoys baking herself to a crisp in this heat..."

The Ultimate Survivalist got silenced by an elbow to the stomach courtesy of Tooth, who pouted as she said "Well, a dentist has to look her part, so the labcoat is staying!"

"Oy... this is supposed to be a party...", said North under a mumbled breath. And I smiled at them as I turned on the grill. They make their way to the water and I can hear their laughs and shrieks as they join Toothless by the lake.

Soon enough, everyone else joins in. Snotlout once again under siege by a combined attack of water guns by Flynn, the Twins and Jack. Rapunzel, Elsa and Anna are not far behind, and though they're reprimanding the boys, their telling smiles show otherwise.

The last to arrive are Astrid, Merida, Sandy and Fishlegs. They arrive carrying a bunch of toys; balls, pool noodles, and... were

those MORE bamboo swords? Yeah, I'm not participating in any of those activities now.

As soon as everyone's here, the mood got livelier with the mixed laughs of teenagers and the happy roars of a certain Night Fury as they splashed around in the water. Soon enough, Astrid and Merida rallied everyone around them and started the games planned for the party.

I didn't join the others, and I was OK with that. I liked watching people have fun, which was the main reason I opted to stay behind cooking. I also quite liked cooking so it was a win-win for me. Anna had volunteered to help me but I guess she got caught up in the excitement and she was forcing Elsa to join the fun and take her out of her reserved shell, so I didn't actually mind.

Of course, Jack was beyond himself, participating in all the competitions that the girls hosted, bouncing with energy and never slowing down. Be it water balloon fights, racing, scavenger hunting and three-foot racing, the Ultimate Mystery's smile never failed to appear even if he lost the competitions. Still, by the end, he managed to earn 3 of North's beautifully crafted medallions and he certainly wasn't above boasting his achievements proudly, earning some laughs and head shakes at his antics.

And so, the evening passed. Jokes and a good mood ruled the day. My hamburgers got passed around and as I sat down on the rocky shore to eat my share and give Toothless his plate, I got congratulated for my food. ("Very nice, mate", "This ain't half bad...", "Simply sublime" were some of the compliments I got)

"Seriously, Hic, these are damn good!", said Jack as he sat next to me, his face stuffed with the burger.

I blushed at the compliment, but I had an image to maintain, "Don't talk with your mouth full, Jack."

"No, seriously, Hic. These... are amazing! I've never had a burger as good as this one!", he said as he took another bite. "This is the best way to end the afternoon."

I didn't know what to say. Jack's sincere feelings left me speechless. Sure, some may say that wearing your heart on your sleeve was foolish but I found Jack's honesty refreshing.

"Thank you." was all I could say.

"Who said the afternoon was over, Overland?", said Merida as she ran towards the lake. "We're going to swim 'till we drop!"

Soon enough everyone but Toothless, Jack and I ran towards the lake, Fishlegs' protests of "Guys, we need to digest our food before swimming!" unheard. Toothless simply curled himself around me to sleep.

Jack removed his tanktop and Odin's ghost, why did I have to look? OK, he was pale and gangly, and sure he wasn't ripped or anything, but his body still had defined, lean muscles, proof of an active life-style. I had to mentally slap myself for this slip up. Now I wasn't going to be able to resist sketching this white haired idiot

in his blue swimming trunks.

At this point, I think the biggest idiot is me.

It took me a few seconds to realize that Jack was still next to me, eyeing the swimming group with a sad look. Odd...

"Jack, is there something wrong?", I asked.

The white haired teen rubbed the back of his head, hesitant, before he let out a big sigh. He turned to see me, his face red with embarrassment.

"Hic... I... don't know how to swim."

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I don't know why I was so embarrassed right now.

All things considered, I had done things today that were far more embarrassment-worthy (I swear to god that water balloon wasn't meant to hit Aster THAT hard), but admitting this to Hic was... pretty hard.

Sure, I had played on water all day long, but never IN water. I only splashed around the edge of the lake, but never inside of it. I really didn't know how to swim.

Hic just kept looking at me with a confused look. I'm sure he found it odd... and I guess I feared the fact that he would be disappointed in me, even though that thought didn't make sense. Hiccup wasn't like that, but still, I felt the need to impress him.

Hic's sigh caught me by surprise, but what caught me more by surprise was the fact that he stood up and removed his tank top.

Freckles. They were not only on his face but also on his arms, hands and chest. Dots upon tiny dots. All over his small, lithe but still a little defined frame. But what caught my attention were the scars. I vaguely recognized the spidery tendrils etched on his chest as lightning scars... just what kind of life did this Viking lead? A cough from Hic made me aware that I had been gawking at him, and the boy was blushing furiously, obviously self-conscious. I looked away, suddenly aware of the fact that I was blushing too. What the hell, Jack? Don't be weird.

"S-so... swimming! I was thinking... y'know... how about... I teach you?" said Hic stammering, obviously trying to erase that awkward movement between us.

"You, teach me?", I asked dumbfounded. So that's why he had removed his tank top and put himself in this uncomfortable situation. To teach me...

"Yeah... I'm not half-bad at it, so I can teach you the basics if you want...", he said shrugging.

I almost wanted to hug him for that. But I was aware that doing so

would likely kill the kid on the spot from embarrassment so I simply walked next to him and put a reassuring hand on his small, freckled shoulder. "I would love that. Really."

I simply had to smile at the astonished look on the Ultimate Lucky Student face as it slowly melted into an embarrassed, crooked grin.

"Huuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurl."

We both jumped at the familiar, odious, cartoony voice, Toothless growling menacingly at the Headmaster who had decided to appear just now.

"I can't believe I had to watch all of this. This is seriously the worst. If this were an anime it would probably be one of those lame Beach Episodes and this would be the moment were the guy and the girl kiss passionately and then they do this and that... and then he puts that in and she..." rambled the bear.

I felt my cheeks burn with embarrassment and anger. Monobear just had to ruin our fun. "What do YOU want?", I spat.

"Um... I just wanted to remind you guys that while I understand you guys are healthy teens with cravings and such... This place is strictly PG-13! So I will not tolerate unscrupulous behavior in my Camp! I know these kinds of stories are rated M but we can't pressure the writers into doing something they aren't comfortable with, understand?"

No, I didn't understand half of the things the bear was saying.

"What do you mean-", asked Hiccup before being interrupted by the Headmaster once more.

"Look, all I'm saying is that I'm OK with passionate kisses between lovers but if things go farther than touchy feely moments, I will punish you guys OK? That's a new rule I put up to protect you guys."

Sure enough, a faint buzz on my trunks alerted me to the new rule.

-Any kind of extremely intimate or perverted activity will be met with deathly punishment. Let's live a pure, fun life in harmony.

...Just how are we going to explain this to the others...? I wasn't looking forward to THAY conversation. And by the looks of it, neither was Hic, who put tomatoes to shame as he blushed a bright red. Before we could tell Monobear to leave us alone, we were joined by the others, obviously alerted by their ElectroIDs which surprisingly still worked despite them being soaked.

"What do YOU want?", asked Merida with a scowl.

"Can't you see we're, like, having fun?" said Tuff. "Without you", added Ruff.



Monobear's face dropped, "Yeah. I can see that, and it's not fair, y'know? Excluding your Headmaster from your party even after all the trouble I went to set up a fun event for you guys..."

"Event... you say?" asked Pitch.

At that Monobear spun in place. "Yeah, um... remember what I told you guys this morning? I just finished setting it up on the Meeting Grounds so I came to pick you guys up! So go on! Go there! Assistance is mandatory, of course, but I'd be nice if you went there without grumbling! So... see ya there!"

And as usual, Monobear left after saying his piece, not letting us object or comment. A sense of dread filled me. There was no way Monobear's event was going to be 'fun', but we had no choice but to obey. I didn't want to endanger any of us... but still..

"Anything that is mandatory isn't 'fun' at all..." quipped Hic as he put on his tank top again.

"No kidding", agreed Flynn.

"Aw, I wanted to swim more and perhaps find a Merman...", whined Rapunzel.

"Uh, you do know those aren't real, right?", said Elsa.

"If they're in books, they have to be real, though!", said Rapunzel, who believed everything she read.

"Excuse me, ladies, but I think we have more pressing matters than discussing mythological creatures." interjected Pitch.

I had to agree with that. I'm sure Monobear wouldn't tolerate tardiness, so I put on my tank top and followed everyone else towards the Meeting Spot, a thick silence between us as we readied ourselves for whatever Monobear was plotting.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Of all the things that I was expecting to see in the Meeting Spot, a gaudy stage wasn't one of them. Annoyingly bright neon lights which read "750th Annual Monobear Quiz-o-rama!" flashed above the stage, which also had three contestant booths. The most noticeable thing, though was the addition of an ominous machine, colored black, next to the flagpole which housed the camp's flag.

Said machine was in the shape of a bear's head, Monobear's characteristic red eye even painted on it. The most noticeable thing about the machine, though, was a LED display that showed a number slowly decreasing, with another set of numbers underneath those reading: 26 DAYS LEFT.

All in all, like everything in this camp, these things were out of place, and that made this whole thing more unnerving. Our captor didn't care about anything... not about us... certainly... that was the feeling I got from all of this... and that scared me more than anything.

Regardless... back to the sign of the stage... a quiz show? Is that what Monobear had planned all day long? Sure, it was unexpected but I thought the damn bear would have planned something more underhanded.

Said bear appeared shortly on stage, wearing a blue formal suit and a red bowtie, a microphone on hand while he waved at us with the other. No one returned the greeting, predictably.

Monobear was obviously displeased at this and he frowned and stomped his feet while he whinned: "Ugh! Why the long faces? I went to the trouble of making this stage and everything and you can't even wave back?!"

No one even bothered to answer; we were all obviously so done with our captor. At the continued silence, the Headmaster just sighed before rambling once again: "I swear, kids these days don't know the wholesome fun that quiz shows provide... I mean, who can resist the drama? The suspense? The prizes?!"

At that, Snotlout spoke up, the prospect of winning at something overpowering his need to shut up and sulk; "What do you mean, prizes?"

"Glad you asked, Snotty!", said Monobear while he pointed at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, "You see, in these types of shows, three smart contestants will compete answering a series of challenging questions to determine who will win the prize!"

"And what is this prize?", asks Peter.

"Weeeell... you won't know unless you guys participate!", says the Headmaster joyfully.

I have a bad feeling about this... should we even participate? I mean, he did say attending is mandatory but I wonder if we can exploit a loophole and opt out of this...

"C'moon! I swear on my good name that this is just a simple quiz show with no strings attached. I'm even letting you guys nominate the contestants yourselves...", Monobear is practically begging us to participate... now I'm suspicious... and he did say this was going to be a 'motive', whatever that is... I think we should just leave an-

"I nominate Hiccup! That smarty-pants is probably itching to show off anyways, and being smart is the only good thing he can do!"

Geez, thank you for that glowing review of my person, Snotlout. You sure know how to praise a guy. I calm Toothless down before he takes a bite out of him, but before I can retort and protest, Rapunzel speaks up: "Yeah! Go for it, Hiccup! I'm sure you'll do great!"

"Y-yeah! Show that Monobear who is the... brains of our group!", says Anna, uncharacteristically stuttering as she joins the 'Let's force Hiccup to do a thing he doesn't want to do' bandwagon.

"Listen, I think we should think this through before we decide on

anything, OK?", I say, as I try to wiggle my way out of this. I'm not in the mood to deal with Monobear.

"You should just roll with it, ankle-biter." says Aster. "Y'know that damn bear ain't gonna stop pestering us until we participate in his dumb game, so you might as well participate and actually get somethin' out of it, don't ya think?". OK, he has a valid point... but why me? I can't believe he's forcing me to do this...

"Oh? So Hiccy is gonna play? Hmm... I'm not sure he's up to the task, but whatever! Come on the stage and take your place, would ya?", says Monobear as he overhears our conversation.

Grudgingly, I walk over one of the empty contestant booths. I'll show that bear who isn't 'up to the task'... From the stage, I can see Toothless and Jack, who sheepishly gives me a thumbs up and I can't help but smile a bit at the gesture.

"Gross". I hear Monobear say, and I have to glare at the Headmaster. What's his deal?

"Aaaanyway... hurry up and pick the rest of the contestants already!" demands the bear. After a few arguments and excuses, our group settles on Fishlegs (Who is the Ultimate Encyclopedia for a reason), and Jack (Who lost on rock-paper-scissors against Merida when they argued about who should participate). Fishlegs looked like a deer struck by headlights and Jack was practically fuming as he scowled at Merida with his arms crossed. I guess... it could be worse. At the very least, the Twins and Snotlout didn't get picked, but will Jack be OK?

I'm interrupted by Monobear, who finally uses that microphone he was carrying, his amplified voice drowning my thoughts out. "Aaaalrighty! Let's begin the 750th Annual Quiz-o-rama! The rules are simple! Just press the button in your contestant booth after I read to question and answer correctly! If you do well enough, I'll reward you all! So... do your beeeest~"

I have to admit... even though I'm not really playing to win... I'm nervous for some reason. The flashing neon lights don't help either. From the corner of my eye, I can see Fishlegs fidgeting nervously, while Jack is the complete opposite of him, a glint of excitement on his blue eyes visible.

"Ahem! Let's begin with a simple one...", says Monobear as he takes out a card from his suit and begins reading. My hand hovers slightly over the button as he reads: "Question 1! Did you guys know each other before you awoke in Hope's Peak Academy's lobby?"

I press the button before I process the question, so I get the chance to answer, but now that I think about it... that's a strange question... but the answer is obvious, nonetheless. "No. With the exception of Anna and Elsa, we all first met in that room."

A loud buzzer and a flash of red lights sounds above me, and a bucket of water is emptied on me. I can hear a laugh track on the distance. "Oh, I'm sooo sorry Hiccy! That's incorrect! The correct answer was: You guys all know each other rather well!"

Great. I'm soaking wet, humiliated AND confused. What is Monobear

getting at? That answer doesn't make any sense! I can see everyone else's confused expression but before I can voice my confusion, Monobear continues.

"Alright! Next Question! Ahem... You guys have been Hope's Peak Academy students for how long now?"

Still confused by the previous question, Fishlegs beats us to the punch and presses the button, looking amazed by the fact that he actually pressed the button.

"Um... I'm 100% sure we haven't been students of Hope's Peak for even a day... But we've been in this camp for 4 days..."

Another loud buzz and Fishlegs is now dripping wet, his blonde hair flattened and covering his eyes.

"Aw, that's wrong, Fishy! You guys have studied in Hope's Peak for years now! OK... next question..."

"Hold on!", I interrupt Monobear. This... doesn't make sense! What is... this dread I'm feeling? "Just... what are you plotting? What do you mean by those answers? This whole thing is... nonsensical!"

"Hiccy, please! Don't interrupt me! It's in bad form!", says Monobear, wagging a finger at me in a disapproving tone, my questions ignored. "Now then... Next question..."

An uncomfortably long silence follows, and that sense of dread in my stomach intensifies when the Headmaster's red eye lights up maliciously. Oh no... that's never a good sign...

A simple sentence. That's all it took to make me question everything.

"Who took your memories of your school life and imprisoned you in this place?"

Dead silence.

No one spoke. Nor moved. All of us were trying to process the simple yet nonsensical string of words we've just heard. 'Take away our memories'?,,, absurd. What does that even mean? How can we even take that sentence seriously? How can we ever answer that?

A buzz breaks the silence. I slowly turn my head to face Jack. He's the one who's pressed the button. His face is even paler than usual, his eyes are wide as plates, the look on them distant. His jaw is clenched tight... Overall, he's the look of apprehension incarnate... And its in that instant that I realize why.

Jack's missing memories.

Monobear's question.

Could it be...?

"Was it... you?", Jack's deep voice is clear on the silence. A green light and a shower of confetti falls on the blue-eyed teen but the

mood is anything but celebratory.

"Cooooorrect, Frosty! And to think you actually got it right! Puhuhuhu!", says the Headmaster teasingly, but the jab is ignored, as Jack's brow furrow with thought.

Everyone else can't take the confusion any longer. Soon enough, the audience starts bombarding the Headmaster with questions upon questions, trying to make sense out of this nonsense.

"What do you mean by 'you guys knew each other beforehand?'", says Astrid

"What's this about us having attended Hope's Peak for a long time?", shouts Flynn.

"This 'taking our memories' thing is quite frankly, confusing.", says Peter.

The Headmaster, however, appears undaunted by all the questions, and I swear his grin got wider as he lifts a paw to silence everyone and speak.

"Well, you know how its a common plot twist to reveal that all the strangers you've been killing to escape were your friends in reality, but since the Mastermind took your memories of that, you killed them without knowing? Well, I'm tired of that predictable crap, so I decided to come clean about it right here, right now!", said Monobear as if it were the most obvious thing to do.

I hear him saying those words, but I can't believe what I'm hearing. "That's... What...?", I am at a loss for words. Monobear however, continues speaking.

"You have this look of confusion in your face... aren't you supposed to be smart? Puhuhuhu!", he giggles at me, "I mean what I say: You guys aren't strangers to each other at all! You've all been studying in Hope's Peak Academy for years but I took your memories of that time!"

"That's bullshit!", interrupts Snotlout angrily. "I've never seen these guys before all of this happened!"

"He's right, y'know!", says Tuff, "I mean, I've seen Ruff every day of my life but everyone else? Nuh uh."

"Yeah, and attending Hope's Peak Academy for years? We're not exactly the most smart but I doubt we would fail to notice THAT.", says Ruff.

"And all this talk of stealing our memories...", says Tooth, shaking her head, "That's nothing short of impossible."

"Y'know... you guys are fond of that word... 'impossible'...", Monobear speaks as he shows his black side towards us, his red eye shining brightly, "But you only say that because things that aren't supposed to happen are happening, right? So why is it still impossible if it's happening? The truth is, you guys just don't want to admit that the reality you were living in isn't as stable as you thought. But this is your reality now... your new truth. Isn't that

so, Jackson?"

We all freeze. Jack is looking at the Headmaster in shock, obviously surprised to be put in the spot like that. He wanted that to be a secret but...

"Wh-what-", the white haired teen starts but is interrupted.

"Aw, come on Jackson! Don't tell me you didn't tell them about how you don't remember anything? Nothing beyond your name... right? And here I thought you trusted these guys as your friends... but it turns out you don't even trust them at all! How terrible!", goads the Headmaster as Jack's face is stricken with guilt.

"S-so... it was you? Were you the one who...?", I interrupt, trying to save Jack from more embarrassment but the bear is upon me instantly.

"Geez, why am I not surprised he told YOU? But yes, I did that... years of heartfelt memories, sad moments, intimate scenes... all gone like a salary check after a barbecue party!"

Anger flared inside me. Why...?! "Why would you do that?", I spat the Headmaster but he ignored me as he turned back to the others and continued to talk at leisure.

"And before you guys start saying 'But we have been here for 4 days only! There's no way we've been attending Hope's Peak for years!...'... do you guys really trust your perception of time that much? I mean... don't you guys lose that perception when you lose consciousness?"

At that... memories of my arrival to Hope's Peak and my loss of consciousness come to mind. "Are you saying... that our loss of consciousness was because...?", I ask, short of breath, hoping that I am wrong.

"That's correct! That was the cutoff point, to be precise! That's when your school memories were supposed to be- Happy memories of friendship and even romance! Years of fond moments of comradeship... gone! And you guys are none the wiser! And that's when you realize all that talk of 'bonds are eternal' a phooey! You guys didn't even notice!"

The Headmaster kept taunting us as we all stood there, unable to refute anything he said. This was madness... All of the things Monobear is saying are so unbelievable... and yet, we can't deny those words outright. Saying 'I don't believe it!' doesn't discredit the things he said... which makes this whole thing more frustrating.

"So what...?", Merida's voice is more subdued than normal, even though she's showing a defiant expression towards the Headmaster. "So what if you stole our memories or whatever! I don't get why you're telling us this crazy stuff!"

"Why, Mermer... that's a good question!", says Monobear to the scowling red head, "This is my bargaining chip!"

With a jump, the black and white bear jumps on Fishlegs' contestant

booth, causing the large boy to jump back in fear. "Ahem...", the bear clears his throat, and that sense of dread returns stronger than ever as he speaks. "This is a beary simple offer... to the one who kills first... I'll return to them their school memories... no, all of their memories, if applicable!"

A chill ran through my entire being as I let the words sink in. So that was it... this was his 'motive'. So this... was Monobear's trap...

"It's a pretty good deal if I say so myself... I mean, knowledge is the most important gift, and on top of that you'll get out of here as well! If I were you guys, I'd be stabbing someone already! Ahahaha!"

Without intending to, I had started sweating, the cold drops running down my face. This... wasn't good. Why was I afraid...? No one... no one would kill... for some memories, right...? Instinctively, I turned to see Jack. What I saw left me even more afraid; Jack's normally blue-sapphire like eyes were dull, as if a veil had been put over them; there was no fun, no enjoyment, no life in those eyes. And I hated it, I hated this version of Jack, so at odds with the guy I knew. There was only one word to describe those eyes.

Despair.

I could feel it, that thick cloud descending slowly but surely upon us. Doubt would soon take ahold of us, filling us with 'What ifs?' and distrust.

Monobear's laugh only stoked my anger. Why...? Why was he doing this to us?! Why was so keen on making us suffer? Just to make us 'despair'? Well, if that's what he wants, then I'm not giving it to him!

"There's... there's no way someone will kill...! No one's going to fall for your tricks!", I shout as defiantly as I can, but the Headmaster barely flinches, instead opting to tilt his head at me in confusion.

"Wow, Hiccy, you almost sounded like a protagonist there. That was such a cool line! Y'know... it's such a shame you trust these guys that much... because I can assure you someone WILL kill."

And even though the night was already going pretty badly, Monobear managed to upset our evening again with another simple string of words.

"As a consolation prize for sucking so much at the quiz show, I guess I can tell you all this: There's a traitor among you guys!"

You could hear a pin drop in the brief silence that followed that sentence.

"What do you mean, traitor?", said North, his loud voice clear and demanding.

"Geez, do I have to define what 'traitor' means too? You guys are truly hopeless!", said Monobear, shaking his head.

"Just tell us already you little bugger!", yelled Aster, clearly exasperated with the bear.

"I already told you, there's a traitor in your midst! An inside agent of mine, observing you guys, faking to be your friend... but he's really working for me!"

As he said those chilling words, Monobear leapt high into the hair and landed softly on Toothless' head, who was trying his best to hold back, remembering what the bear had done to him previously.

"So... if things ever get too boring... BAM! I just have to say the word and he'll kill one of you!"

"That's not true!", cried out Rapunzel, "You're lying! There's... no traitor!"

"You know... traitors always say that...", said Monobear nonchalantly, to which the blonde gasped in response, bringing her hand to her mouth.

"But its no lie. Despite how much you guys have been trying to convince yourselves of this so called trust that exists between you... the truth is, someone is betraying you guys at this very moment! Will you take the risk of trusting someone like that?", Monobear's black side faced us once again as he jumped from Toothless's head to the stage.

"And just so you know, the traitor WILL get their memories back if they kill first. Wouldn't it be just so awful that such a rotten backstabber is going to get their memories back AND get out? Puhuhuhu... yes, very dreadful indeed..."

I had enough. I didn't want to hear anything anymore. The more he spoke, the more the seed of doubt and distrust that I thought I had destroyed grew inside of me. I... didn't want things to go back to how it used to... I wanted those feelings of comradeship we had during the party back...

"No one... is going to kill...", I said, mostly to myself. Because I needed to convince myself of that. Because I... to my disgust, briefly considered the thought. But I'm not... will not ever kill...

"You're in denial, I see. But I'd make a decision fast if I were you, guys! This is a first-come-first-serve kind of deal so if you dillydally, someone is going to beat you to the kill! So hurry up... you don't have much time!", said the Headmaster as he looked at the odd clock-like contraption.

"Now then, this quiz show deal is boring me, so you're dismissed! Let the mutual killing begin! Ahahahaha!"

And just like that, Monobear disappeared his laugh echoing, mocking us as we stood there, unable to come to terms with our situation.

Fishlegs scurried down from the stage and joined the others but neither me and Jack moved. Toothless ran to my side and curled next to me, growling at me worriedly. I appreciated the gesture and



scratched behind his frills.

How... did I get into this mess?

"So... what are we going to do?", asked Tooth, obviously nervous.

"Isn't it obvious?", said Snotlout. "We should just sacrifice someone!"

"What?!", said North obviously displeased.

"I mean, I don't know about you guys, but I'm tired of walking around aimlessly... so here we have a chance to get some info, so I say we take the fucking bear's offer!", said the Ultimate Heavy Lifter.

"Snotlout, are ya even hearing what you're saying?! You're saying we should kill someone! Do you believe Monobear or somethin'!?", shouted Merida, anger tinting her voice as she advanced on the brown haired male.

"Well...! He's never lied to us right?", defended Snotlout.

"He's got a point..."

"Not helping, Fishlegs.", said Astrid.

"I'm just saying! We could get some actual progress here! We just need to off someone weak and unimportant!", immediately, Snotlout's eyes fell on me. "Like the fishbone!"

Toothless growled upon hearing those words, and Jack's head snapped up so fast I thought he'd dislocate it.

"I mean... he doesn't even have a real talent! He's not important and I'm sure no one is going to miss hi-"

Snotlout never got to finish those words as he was once again in the receiving end of Astrid's fist. The look on her face was one of subdued rage, but her words were clearly full of commanding fury: "Enough. Snotlout. Drop it."

"We're not killing anyone here, OK?! Let us all settle down, yes?", said North, trying to calm us down, but it was useless. Snotlout stood up with an angry huff and shot a venomous look in my direction.

"You better watch your back, fishbone! If I don't get you, I'm sure the traitor will off you first!", and with that, he ran away from the group.

"Shouldn't we stop him?", asked Anna worried.

"And do what? Kill him?", asked Flynn.

"I second that motion.", said Tuffnut. "I third it", added Ruffnut.

"We're not killing anyone, Ok?!" yelled North, silencing everyone.

"Monobear is obviously lying! Do not fall for the bear's lies! We will continue to defy him... peacefully! Understood?"

Even though no one spoke back to him, we were far from certain... there was no guarantee that no one had bought Monobear's words. Once again, the feeling of distrust between us destroyed any semblance of comradeship.

All because of the Headmaster.

As everyone excused themselves and disbanded, that wretched feeling of loneliness and fear started to creep in my heart again.

Because... because what Snotlout said was true...

I'm... useless. Nothing special. Even my talent is phony. I'm weak.

Ugly.

Even my own father is ashamed of me.

I can't... even make others feel better. Because I know Jack is suffering more than I am.

And yet... I only care about myself.

I truly... am worthless.

Someone like me... doesn't belong here. Doesn't belong anywhere.

I... would it be... better... if I died? Would I... be more useful that way?

I feel... so cold.

So alone once again... I haven't felt... this alone in years.

I... want to be surrounded by this loneliness once again. Yes... This is what I deserve... someone like me... doesn't deserve anything less..

I start walking mechanically towards the Lodging Area, vaguely noticing Toothless's attempts to comfort me. And another thing to add to the list of things I'm bad at: Shaking off any help I'm offered because of my stupid pride and hurting others in the process.

I don't... deserve Toothless' friendship. I don't... deserve anything. I deserve to shut myself inside my cottage and... never show my face again.

I keep walking towards my cottage when a strong grip on my wrist stops me cold.

...So... this is how I die, huh... I guess it's... for the best... I close my eyes as I resign myself to this... not caring who is going to kill me.

"Hic... Hiccup..."

Jack's deep voice makes me open my eyes, but I... don't want to face him. Guilt fills me as I recall how I just... walked away from him instead of trying to comfort him. Hah... I truly am terrible...

"Hiccup... please..."

Jack's begging voice starts to break my resolve. Why... is he...?

"Please talk to me, Hic..."

What... do you want me to say? Anything I say will be worthless... just like I am...

"I'm... scared, Hic..."

At that, I turn around. Jack's pale frame is shaking, and he's looking at the ground.

"I'm scared, Hiccup... please... I... I don't want to be alone..."

"I feel so empty... I feel like I have nothing, that I don't exist... and when I dwell on that loneliness... these thoughts... I don't want to think like that...! So please... Hic...! Talk to me, do that sarcasm of yours... do anything!", Jack's voice is desperate by this point and I'm so taken aback that words fail me.

He... really is suffering.

I thought I understood him, but I didn't. His memory loss goes beyond what I thought. And I'm seeing it in front of me. Not having anything to relate to, to refer to... not having any assurance that the you that exists right now is the real you...

With a burst of courage, I pull Jack towards me and hug him.

It's an awkward embrace, since he's taller than me, but I try to convey my feelings as good as I can; that he exists right here, and right now. That he's important to me, the Jack that he is right now and no other Jack.

He tenses upon being hugged but he returns to gesture fast, holding on to me strongly. We stay like this for a few minutes, but I don't mind. Because I think... we both needed this. No words are exchanged. The embrace tells all; fears, doubts... and warmth.

"Thank you, Hic.", he says quietly in my ear, still hugging me.

"That's what friends are for", I answer.

He hums quietly but makes no remark, and instead he tightens the hug for a moment before slowly letting go. I can't help but feel bad that, but I feel much, much better now. Even though my crush will always be unrequited, I got to hug this dork, who looks so content now.

And that sheepish grin of his, full of happiness... well... it certainly made me forget about our situation for a bit.

Suddenly, a blush creeps on Jack's face and he coughs awkwardly before looking away. What...? Did he get bothered by my actions? But he thanked me... didn't he?

"I-I won't tell anyone... don't worry...", I say, trying to calm him down, but he instead looks at me with a questioning look.

"What?"

"Th-that I hugged you... err... I understand if it embarrassed you... so I won't tell...", I say as I move my hands around.

"I'm not embarrassed by that...!", he says a little more loudly, and upon noticing this, he blushes even more.

"Then why did you...?"

"It's nothing...!"

He keeps looking away from me... and though I'm curious about what really is on his mind... I won't pressure him. I'm glad... we're acting like we always do once again. I don't want to ruin that.

We say our good-byes as we reach our cottages, though Jack still looks a bit hesitant as he enters his. I try to not dwell too much on that, though, as I ready myself for bed.

I guess... I'm good at something, after all.

As I curl myself on Toothless' sleeping form on my cottage's floor to draw some more, my thoughts wander to that hug. Typical of me to make a mountain out of a molehill... it was just a hug. Nothing more.

After catching myself drawing the whitette once more, I close my sketchbook and I drop myself into my bed, the faint sound of rain hitting the roof of my cottage filling the background.

After such an exhausting day, the rhythmic sound of rain helps me ease into a sound sleep long before Monobear's Night Time announcement can be heard.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

Gods Jack, what's wrong with you?!

Why did that memory have to return just as you hugged your boyfriend-friend! Friend! Hiccup's just a very good friend!

"My mind is playing tricks on me", I mutter to myself.

Yes, that's it... I'm sure that memory of me holding his hand and hugging and kissing... was just a confused thought because of the

moment!

Yes... that was a false memory... it wasn't even a memory! It was a delusional thought, right...?

Right...

...Then why... do I feel like I don't want it to be a delusional thought...?

**\*\*MONOBEAR THEATER\*\***

"Have you ever said something you regretted? Surprisingly, I have!"

"For example... take this! Back at the zoo I lived in, I had two good friends. A fox named Carl and a squirrel named Sir Earlhart. To be frank, Carl was very stupid, and Earlhart took advantage of him every day. If Earlhart said something, Carl would do it. If Earlhart said something, no matter how ridiculous, Carl would believe it. He was quite gullible.

In any case, long story short, one day I made an offhand comment. 'Did you know foxes are the natural predators of squirrels?'

Needless to say, Carl devoured Earlhart on the spot. The zookeepers had to put Carl down because of this, too.

And that's how my words robbed me of my friends. Please be careful about what you say."

## 11. 1 - Chapter 1 - Normal Lives F

**\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - Normal Days  
F\*\***

**\*\*Jack's POV\*\***

I didn't have a good night sleep at all, but that was to be expected. After everything that happened yesterday, it was a surprise that I even fell asleep. Ever since that fake quiz show, my mind has been plagued by unpleasant thoughts.

And some of them were related to a certain Viking.

What was that memory? Was it even a memory? Was it a prank of my subconscious? But then... what did that say about me?

Did I... want that memory... if it even is a memory... to be true?

I talked to Sandy through IM for a few hours yesterday, hoping to get some answers... and even though nothing concrete came out of that conversation, I did manage to learn some things from the Ultimate Dream Interpreter.

The first thing was that the blonde haired boy loved to tease me about my confusion. All of his messages ended with winky faces and if it weren't for the fact that I liked Sandy and that I needed his

help, I would've shut him off.

The second thing was far more helpful. Even though he couldn't really tell me if my memory was real or not (Even I wasn't sure about that), he did theorize that certain actions will trigger specific memories... and so far it made sense. All of the memories I've gotten back came back to me after I did something with Hiccup.

So... was that a real memory then?

And thus, I struggled through the night with these thoughts. If only I could confirm these things by myself.

Briefly, Monobear's offer flashed on my mind, but I dismissed the thought instantly.

I... had considered it, though. And that was scary. I truly considered taking a life however briefly, and that repulsed me. Even if Monobear did take my memories away, I wouldn't be able to force myself to kill...

Death wasn't right. And killing? Even less so.

That... was... something I couldn't abide with. I would find another way to get my memories back... yes, I'll just keep doing what I've been doing until now: Hang around Hic.

Suddenly, a vision of he and I holding hands flashes in my mind, and I feel apprehension in my heart. Or... is it nervousness?

This... isn't going to be easy... right?

How do I even... proceed? If these random flashes of memory keep happening whenever I'm around Hiccup... will I be able to act as if nothing happened? Maybe he will notice? Hiccup is smart, after all. He will notice if I start acting up in front of him?

Should I avoid him, then? ...No, that'd be running away from the problem... plus... he'd surely get the wrong idea and I would end up hurting him... and I don't want that.

...Gah! Why is this so complicated?! I JUST want to be his friend! Right?!

...Right... yeah, just friends... I only want that...

Then why do I... don't believe that?

\* \* \*

><p>Monobear's morning announcement came and I hastily left my cottage. The morning air was cool and the camp grounds were wet due to rain. Reluctantly, I put on some shoes. Hiccup would surely throw a fit if I walked barefooted in the mud.<p>

Speaking of that Viking, it's about time we pick him up.

"Yo, Jack."

I turn around at the greeting. I see Merida waving at me, and though

she's smiling, I can see there's something in her mind because of the look on her face.

"Sup, Mer?"

"Stop calling me that, Jack!", she threatens.

"Make me!", I say as I stick my tongue out, barely avoiding the swing she took at me. She chases me around, shouting obscenities all the while, but I manage to run circles around her. One thing I learned is that I'm a pretty good runner, so why shouldn't I use that for my advantage?

"When I get my hands on you...!", says Merida, panting a few feet away from me.

"In your dreams!", I taunt. I'm gonna get it later, but I'm savoring my victory right now.

"Looks like someone is full of energy this morning."

We all turn to see Astrid slowly approaching us, a smirk on her face.

"Sure am, miss-Ow!", My greeting gets interrupted by a punch on my arm, courtesy of Merida, who grins triumphantly as I rub my arm. Such a sore loser...!

"I can see that. Are we going to pick up Hiccup?", asks Astrid, laughing in-between at my pain.

"Yeah! We just need to wake up the sleeping beaut-", and that's all I manage to say before I'm pushed to the ground and I'm assaulted by a giant pink tongue and a familiar dragon breath.

"There's no need for that. You guys are the perfect alarm clock, y'know?"

The familiar, sarcastic nasally voice of his makes me happier than I dare to admit. Toothless gets off me and runs back to his auburn haired friend, who places a small hand on the dragon's head.

"Well, good morning to you too.", I retort as I try to get the saliva out of my hoodie, without much success.

"It doesn't watch out, just so you know.", says Hiccup as he smiles at my vain attempts. I have to groan at that. I love this hoodie!

"Well, the saliva actually helps his looks.", says Merida, to which everyone else laughs.

"Thanks, Mer.", I deadpan. What a nice way to start the morning...

...Though I'd rather start my mornings like this... with laughter and friends. Yes, this guys are my friends... despite everything that happened yesterday. Despite what Monobear said about me... these guys aren't judging me or condemning me. Yeah... starting every day just like this... I wouldn't mind that...

"Say... aren't we missing someone?", says Hiccup as he looks around.

Now that you mention it...

"Ya... hey, where's Sandy?", asks Merida, mimicking Hiccup.

"I haven't seen him since yesterday...", says Astrid.

A sense of dread fills me suddenly.

Nah... I'm... overthinking this... I mean. I talked to him yesterday! So... he must be late... just a little behind schedule, yes...

"Are those... mud tracks?", asks Hiccup as he points out to a set of footprints leaving a cottage towards the Meeting Spot.

My heart sinks as I see the cottage. I fumble for my ElectroID and a look at the map confirms my fears.

Sandy's cottage.

I barely hear my friend's voice as I sprint away towards the Meeting Spot, following the muddy tracks.

Why am I panicking? There's no need to panic. I'm sure... I'm overreacting... so there's no need to be afraid! I'm sure... he just went for a morning walk... yes... that's right! I'm sure I'll find him in the Meeting Spot, greeting me with that silent smile of his...! I can see the flagpole already...

It was sudden.

Like a sucker punch. Completely unexpected... but then again... you never expect to find something like this in your life.

Because although it's inevitable, you're never ready to see it face-to-face.

The dead body of Sandy Onirico, The Ultimate Dream Interpreter... a calm, understanding and kind person... was hung up on the camp's flagpole, his corpse wrapped with the flag itself... completely inert and devoid of anything that made him Sandy.

And in that moment, as I fell to my knees in disbelief, I wanted nothing more than to scream. To deny the scene in front of my eyes.

But just like death itself, the scene in front of me was the truth.

The horrible, undeniable truth.

**\*\*CHAPTER 1 - A YOUTHFUL SUMMER OF DESPAIR - NORMAL DAYS END\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Puhuhuhuh! See ya guys later!<strong>



## 12. 1 - Chapter 1 - (ab)Normal Lives A

### Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - (ab)Normal Days

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hey, we saw each other sooner than expected no? This chapter... is rather short, but hey, we need a transition chapter every now and then!<strong>

\*\*Thank you all for the reviews! I truly appreciate them from the bottom of my despair-ridden heart! But enough waxing about my emotions! Here we go!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Ding dong ding dong. A bell chimes in the background, through the entire camp. Soon after, Monobear's voice can be heard through the monitors all over the campsite.

"A body has been discovered! Following a brief period of investigation, the Class Trial will begin!"

A body. A corpse.

So... it's true... Sandy is... dead... I wasn't seeing things... Someone... just died. No... someone... killed Sandy. Someone killed him... one of us.

"This... is really... happening...?", I can hear Astrid's voice, full of disbelief.

"This... can't be...", I hear Merida mumble.

My eyes, however, never leave Jack's frame. The Ultimate Mystery is hunched over on the ground, shaking. I can hear restrained sobs.

I... feel numb. Sandy... was quiet, shy at times. You could honestly miss him if you never bothered to look. But once you knew him, you would always end up looking for him. Though he said no words, he imparted wisdom and his kindness shone brightly on this dire camp like a beacon of light.

And someone... extinguished that light.

I can feel the moisture on my eyes threatening to come out... but I resist the tears.

I... cannot break down like this. Not now. I need to be strong... for someone else.

I make my way towards Jack and I kneel beside him, putting a hand on his back. He flinches away from my touch but upon seeing me, he instantly hugs me. Strongly. As if... he were afraid of losing me. I'm taken aback by the hug at first but I manage to pat him in the back in order to try to soothe him. I don't say anything. Saying

things like 'It's going to be OK!' right now... would be an insult.

Because nothing is OK right now.

I still can't believe someone... dared to murder. And why Sandy? He was so nice... Why did someone kill him? Did... someone really kill him... or did Monobear...?

Said Headmaster appears in front of us, and I honestly wished for Thor to strike the odious mascot.

"Hey, um, so. Are you guys like, done? You need to start investigating already, yes? I'm a patient bear but if you guys waste your time like this, you won't be ready for the Class Trial."

I have to use all my strength to hold Jack back from jumping on the Headmaster. Though I understand his feelings... I have some questions for the stupid stuffed toy.

Astrid mercifully cuts in and asks the Headmaster what was in my mind. "What do you mean... 'Class Trial'?"

Monobear lifts a paw and jumps in a place excitedly at the question. Gods, how can he act so carefree in a situation like this...? "That's a good question, HOFFY! But um, this is kinda important so I'm gonna round up everyone else before I explain... so sit tight and wait here!"

And just like that, Monobear disappears once again, inexplicably. What kind of... technology is at work here for that to be possible? My eyes shift to the strange mechanism from yesterday, its LED display showing now 25 DAYS LEFT.

The mysteries keep piling up... as if our situation wasn't terrible enough.

I finally let Jack go and he falls to his knees again, empty of any desire to move. The energetic boy I knew was nowhere to be seen, understandably so. We all stand there, silent and avoiding to look at the corpse of our friend, which is hanging cruelly from the camp's flagpole.

A few uncomfortable minutes pass before everyone else arrives. Their reactions are all that of horrified disbelief.

"N-no!", I can hear Tooth scream breathlessly

"Yo! This... shit, man... this isn't...", says Flynn, obviously unsettled.

"Is he... is he really...?", asks Fishlegs, looking a little green.

Monobear once again pops up in front of us inexplicably and puts a paw behind his head while smiling at us, his white side facing us mostly. "Of course he IS DEAD. Oh, and before you start thinking about it, he's going to stay dead. This isn't one of those Shonen Manga where you can revive a character after a long quest where you collect powerful magical artifacts. You know... like in that famous

manga! Dragon B-

"SHUT UP!", North's shout reverberates through the area as he advances towards the bear, his whole frame quivering with contained anger. "Why?! Why is he dead?!"

The Headmaster looks completely bored and unimpressed as he looks at North.

"That's a dumb question to ask. He's dead because someone killed him. One of you, to be precise."

"ENOUGH OF YOUR LIES!", North's voice rises far more than usual, "You...! You killed him did you not?! T-there's no... other explanation!", his voice breaks as he ends the sentence.

"Oh, but there is, my dear cheap Santa Claus knock off!", says Monobear as he laughs at the Ultimate Sculptor. "I already told you! Someone in your group killed him! Even if you refuse to believe it, those are the facts! One of you took my offer to heart and proceeded to lower dear young Sandy's curtains prematurely so to speak! All for their selfish desires!"

North fell to his knees, his disbelief slowly giving away in the face of the truth. He... really is taking this hard, isn't he?

We all are.

We... really thought we had... started to trust each other. We really did. That's why... we were able to have fun yesterday. Why we were able to joke around, laugh, compete...

But just like that... everything disappeared. Along with Sandy.

Someone... in our group... killed him and is pretending to mourn...?

I look at everyone's faces and they look genuine... but... is that the truth?

Who can I... really trust?

"Hey hey! I didn't bring you here to weep, y'know! You're all wasting time you could be using to investigate!", says Monobear angrily, drawing our attention at him.

"Investigate? The fuck do you mean?", says Snotlout, who oddly enough looks tired and... are his clothes wet?

"Well, you're going to investigate who killed Sandy, of course!", says Monobear smiling.

"What for? The killer already escaped, no?", says Aster with eyes narrowed.

"You're so stupid! And blind! Like...", says Monobear as he taunts the Ultimate Survivalist with a gleeful laugh, "Besides the recently departed, everyone is still here! Count 'em if you want but I really don't care."

I take a head count and it's true. Everyone is still here.

"And you know why? Because the game is now afoot! That's right... the main attraction in this Camp Trip of Mutual Killing: The Class Trial! It's about to begin! So exciting!" declares Monobear to our confusion.

"W-what's... a Class Trial?", asks Rapunzel inbetween sobs, her eyes red from crying. Right... she... liked to draw with Sandy.

"Allow me to explain, class!", says Monobear as he walks towards the speech podium near the flagpole, forcing us to look at him and... Sandy...

"Simply killing isn't enough to leave the camp! Oh no... first, the Blackened... that is to say, the culprit, will have to do so without anyone finding it out! In other words, he has to fool everyone and pull out the perfect crime! And how will the Blackened do that, you ask? By winning at the Class Trial!"

"During a Class Trial, you guys will discuss the murder in order to find out whodunit! This is why it's important to investigate the crime! Because... because because because! If you can't find out who the Blackened is, he'll leave the camp! But why is this bad, you ask? Well, in order to expose the Blackened, you guys will do a majority vote! And if you guys finger the wrong person... you will all be executed and the Blackened will leave the camp!"

My heart sunk as I heard those words. No...

"W-when you say 'executed'... d-do you mean...?", asks Fishlegs, the green in his face intensifying.

"Yeah, a good ol' death is what I mean, Fishy!", says Monobear jovially.

"So... the culprit will sacrifice everyone else's lives... to leave...?", asks Astrid uncharacteristically pale.

"Yep! But I mean, the Blackened already killed someone, so, hey, what's 14 more lives? Right?", says the Headmaster smiling. Astrid just shakes her head in disbelief and I agree with the sentiment. How...? How far is he willing to go... how can he go this far...?

"What happens if we find out who the Blackened is?"

Jack's voice lacks any emotion, but the look in his face is determined, his eyes focused on the bear as if everything he's saying is the only thing that matters.

No... he isn't really... OK with this...?

"Good question Frosty! Really, it's quite simple! If you guys find out who the killer is, that person will be the only one to be executed for disrupting the peace! After we punish the criminal, our peaceful days will resume and we'll live happily ever after! The End! Or at least, until someone else decides to kill! Puhuhuhu!"

At this, Jack's face softens, and I sigh in relief inside me. "So... we're basically sending someone to their death...?", says the whitette breathlessly.

"Hey, an eye for an eye and all that, right?", says the Headmaster nonchalantly.

"Just... stop. Why... why are you making us do this...?", says Anna, her voice breaking.

"Hey, hey! You guys need to clean up your own messes like big kids, OK? If you wanna survive, you're going to have to fight for it, OK? That means the Class Trial is mandatory, so don't think you can shirk your responsibilities, OK?", says the Headmaster angrily.

"Is there anything like, that isn't mandatory with you?", says Ruffnut annoyed as Tuffnut nods his head.

"Well, I could tell you to pick your nose and that wouldn't be mandatory but eh... In any case...", Monobear pauses as he takes out a small device much like our ElectroIDs, "In the spirit of fairness, I'm going to give you all a gift. Presenting... the Monobear File!"

Monobear walks towards us and continues his explanation as he hands the devices. "Think of this as an autopsy report! I realize you guys aren't actually forensic detectives so this should help you amateurs a bit to get started!"

Right, because I'm sure having experience with murder investigations is a skill normal teens have. I take the Monobear File reluctantly and I pocket it, not wanting to look at it just yet. The Headmaster finishes distributing the file and returns to the speech podium to continue to address us.

"The rest will be up to you! Will you able to find out the truth? Will the Blackened get away? Which side is gonna win? Your hope? Or their despair? Puhuhuhu... things are starting to get exciting!", and as he finishes, his red eye lights up once more, "Do your best... and don't waste your time crying over spilled blood... Aha...hahaha!"

And with that tasteless remark, the bear disappeared once again, but the feeling he left isn't gone with him... this heavy burden slowly pressing on us... threatening to crush us.

We are to investigate our friend's death? And to find out the culprit or else we die? And we're gonna kill someone in order to save ourselves?

This... is too much. How... are we supposed to deal with this...? What... are we to do?

"So... what are we going to do...?", asks Tooth, echoing my thoughts.

No one speaks in the uncomfortable atmosphere but Aster finally breaks the silence. "There's nothin' much we can do.. we're gonna have to investigate."

He's right... even if we don't like this... we have to do it...

Besides... I want to know the truth. I know... I would never be comfortable with myself if I never knew.

"We don't even need to investigate", says Elsa suddenly, her gaze cold and damning, "I already know... who did it."

"Y-you do...?", I ask incredulously.

She nods before glaring at Snotlout. "It was you, wasn't it?"

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter looks genuinely shocked at the accusation. "Huh? The fuck you're talking about?!"

The Ultimate Figure Skater doesn't flinch and continues talking. "Who was it that said yesterday that we should sacrifice someone and even went so far as to threaten Mr. Haddock?"

"B-but...! That was...!", Snotlout stammers, not knowing how to answer.

"Now that I pay close attention to you...", interrupts Peter as he studies Snotlout, "your clothes are drenched... And you don't look well rested... what on Earth happened to you?"

"That is not your problem, weirdo!", says Snotlout a little too fast.

"Huh... suspicious...", says Tuffnut.

"Very much so...", adds Ruffnut.

"Knock it off! I-I didn't do it!", says Snotlout, his face slowly filling with fear as everyone gangs up on him.

But... as much as I want to believe he did it...

"We... shouldn't jump to conclusions... guys...", I say, nervous, as everyone looks at me with disbelief. "I... we should still investigate! This... our lives are on the line here... so... we need to be certain before we jump to conclusions... that's all..." I finish lamely.

"The ankle-biter has a point." says Aster backing me up. "We can't half-ass this."

"I still think Snotlout is highly suspicious." Says Elsa as she glares at me for confronting her.

"And like, super stinky.", adds Ruffnut.

"But... Hic is right...", says Jack serious, his gaze drifting towards Sandy's body, "We have to do this right... for our sake... and Sandy's sake..."

At that, everyone nods.

He's right. There... will be time for grieving later. Right now... we

must survive...! And to do that... we need to find the truth behind our friend's death! We need to start investigating!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well, see ya in a few! Hopefully.<br>\*\*

### 13. 1 - Chapter 1 - (ab)Normal Lives B

\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - (ab)Normal Days B\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hello there! Nothing much to say here but there IS something at the end of the chapter that you guys need to read. But I'm getting ahead of myself! For now, read on!<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

To think... that I would end up investigating a murder. Life is indeed cruel. Especially since... I'm investigating my friend's murder.

My chest aches at the thought of Sandy. He... really helped me. He truly cared about me... aside from Hic, he was the only one who saw the real me, because I felt he wouldn't judge me. And he never did.

And to think that I... never got to thank him. In fact, the last thing I did was burden him with more troubles of mine. I...

That's why I'll... find out the truth. I won't let the killer get away with this...!

Everyone is already dispersing to investigate but I can tell they're unsure about what to do. To be honest, I don't know either. I almost want to act like Elsa and convict Snotlout but Hic is right. We can't half-ass this. This is important.

But where should I... start?

"I guess... we should investigate the body first...", says Hiccup, who startles me. I didn't even notice he was here with me! Man, was I really that deep in thought? In fact, only him and Toothless are here with me.

A pair of green, concerned-looking eyes are directed at me. This won't do... I... can't let my mood ruin theirs any farther. But... investigating the body...?

No way around it. We need... any info we can.

"Yeah... we should.", and I hate how unsure I sound.

Hiccup nods and slowly makes his way towards the flagpole. He hesitates a bit as he looks at Sandy's body but after shaking his head, he proceeds to lower our departed friend with the utmost

care.

And I can only watch. How... can he do this... without feeling sick...?

Apparently, he notices me looking at him, because he looks away after seeing my face. "This... isn't the first time I've seen a corpse... Y'know... village full of vikings living with dragons... accidents... tend to happen...", he trails off as he lowers Sandy's body to the ground, his gaze averting the Ultimate Dream Interpreter's peaceful looking face.

This kid... is really stronger than he looks. I feel nauseous just by looking at the body.

"I... will check this out... if you want. You... should probably read the Monobear File in the mean time... y'know... to divide our workload...", says Hiccup as he takes another look at my face, his eyes full of worry.

Damn... I need to stop looking so weak in front of him. But... I guess I'll take him on that offer. I'm not really... eager to poke around a corpse and it seems like Hic has a bit more experience on that area.

Ignoring the implications of that, I take out the Monobear File and boot it on with a touch. The following information is displayed:

**\*\*The Victim was Sandy Onirico, the Ultimate Dream Interpreter.\*\***

**\*\*Time of Death: 12:30 AM\*\***

**\*\*The victim presents several injuries to it's body, though only one of it was the cause of death: Strangulation. A laceration on his throat and a stab wound on his chest are also present but these are not related to his death.\*\***

Despite not looking at the body, I feel sick. An autopsy report like this... despite the detached tone, it makes the whole thing more real. I look up from the device to see that Hic is done, looking a bit green. Guess even having a bit of experience isn't enough to make the whole thing comfortable.

I take a look at Sandy's body. The flag that was wrapped around him has been undone, and I can see blood stains on it. Of course... that blood probably came from the stab and the... cut on his neck. I grimace as I see the crimson spot on the blonde boy's chest, a tell tale whole on his shirt. I nearly empty my stomach as I see the blood stains on his neck, and even though I can't see the cut itself, just imagining it is enough... And yet... his face is oddly calm... you'd think... that being stabbed or strangled would be painful enough to warrant a reaction... and yet...

"S-so... what did the Monobear File say...?", asks Hic, averting his gaze from the corpse.

"It said that... Sandy died after midnight... he was strangled to death...", I say as even-voiced as I can. Hic nods in understanding,



not looking at me. "Did... you find something...?", I ask tentatively.

Hiccup looks at me, biting his lip while rubbing his arm. Toothless nudges him softly, and the auburn-haired boy nods at the encouragement. "Y-yeah... a lot of odd things... I noticed them, I mean..."

Hiccup pauses, gathering his breath before speaking: "First things first... his... Sandy's body was wet..."

And as soon as Hiccup says that sentence, Monobear appears, panting heavily with a blush on his face. "Did-did you say... wet, Hiccy? My... my... to think that you're only 15 and you already think of stuff like that... you're already becoming an adult!"

Dismissing the heat in my cheeks, I glare at the bear before yelling: "What do you want?!". We don't have time for this...!

"Hmph! And to think that YOU of all people would be interested on Hiccy bein-", says Monobear before I yell at him to get to the point already. Hiccup looks at me weird and I have to hide my face from him. This... blush is too telling...!

"Right. I'm here to help and you yell at me. This rebellious youth of today...", says the Headmaster dejectedly. Hiccup perks up at this. "H-help... that's laughable... what's the catch?"

"H-hey... I'm not always underhanded! Besides... this is actually helpful! I'm just here to tell you that your ElectroID has a new function! Think of it as a NotePad of sorts... you can make notes on whatever you find!", says the Headmaster as a faint buzz on my pocket alerts me that my ElectroID has indeed received the function.

This... will certainly be helpful... but I'm not about to thank this bastard.

It's... his fault this happened...!

"Hmmm.. no thanks? No manners at all, I see! But I'm a tough bear! Your uncouth behavior... won't faze me!", and with a stream of fake tears, Monobear disappeared.

Honestly... I can't get a good read on him... All I know is... that he wants to make us suffer.

"W-well... as I was saying...", says Hiccup, still red in the face from our bear encounter, "Sandy's body was wet, as well as the flag..."

"Yeah, but... that's not weird at all, Hic. I mean... it did rain yesterday, remember?"

"True... but... isn't it odd? You'd think Sandy would at least have an umbrella or something... Going out in the rain unprepared is not something I'd expect of him...", defended the brunette.

Hic had a point. Sure, the killer COULD have gotten rid of Sandy's umbrella but what for? "So... you're saying... Sandy came here

without planning to...?", I asked Hic, trying to figure something out.

Hiccup looked surprised at my question. "Y-yeah... that's what I think... at least."

I guess... that makes sense... but... that doesn't really help us much.

"What else did you find odd, Hic?"

"Well... something that should be there... is not...", begins the Ultimate Lucky Student, "I... can't find Sandy's ElectroID on him..."

Now that IS odd, but not really a mystery... "So, the killer took it?"

Hiccup nods at me. "Yeah, I believe so. The question is... why...?"

More questions we can't answer. This is getting annoying... but I'm not giving up just yet. Why... would anyone need Sandy's ElectroID?

"I dunno, Hic.", I answer sincerely, "But I think this is important... we should probably make a note out of this."

I can see him hesitate a bit before pulling out his own ElectroID and jotting something down. Yeah... having to rely on Monobear's tools... doesn't feel quite right...

Still... we have to do what we can to survive.

"I wonder where the killer took Sandy's ElectroID...", says Hic to himself before shaking his head. "I guess there's no use worrying about it too much..."

"We should still keep an eye out for it though... it could be a valuable clue!", I say with as much conviction as I can.

"Perhaps... in any case", says Hic as he looks at Sandy once more, "I'm sure you already noticed the other odd thing about the... Sandy's body."

I manage to look over the corpse once more and it is then that I notice it.

"Where are Sandy's shoes?", I ask out loud.

It didn't make sense... why would Sandy walk around in the rain without shoes? No wait, hold on, that's not reasonable to think! The most likely scenario is probably...

"The killer took them... most likely...", I can hear Hiccup mumble as I reach the same conclusion. But... why?

"Gah... this is confusing!", I groan as I try to make any sense of this. "Why would... the killer take his shoes?!"

"Well... the only thing I can think of is... the shoes probably were a valuable clue... so the killer had to hid them... maybe...?", Hiccup offered unsure.

I wasn't sure about that. In fact, I wasn't sure about anything at all. We've been looking over our dead friend's body for a long time and yet...!

"We haven't made any progress at all, haven't we...", I say as I keep looking at the blonde boy's peaceful face.

A hand on my shoulder makes me face Hic, who offers a stern, but small smile. "Hey, we can't give up yet!"

That's right... what was I thinking? I CAN'T give up... Not now. We're just getting started, right? I can't be disheartened by this... I'm sure Sandy would've had smacked me on the back of my head for even considering giving up as an option! Besides...

"Yeah, you're right!", I return his smile with a nod. I'm sure this tiny Viking will help me if I ever get confused, even if he's the source of my confusion. He's the smart one, after all.

"But... uh... what do we do now, Hic?", I ask tentatively. I really... don't know what to do. I don't have any experience with this, so naturally, I'm unsure!

Hiccup crosses his arms and closes his eyes tightly, cocking his head to the right, deep in thought... you know... I never noticed how his brow furrows when he starts thinking... and it's kinda cu- focus Jack!

"Hmm...", Hic opens his eyes and looks at Sandy once again, "We should... look for whatever caused those wounds... and we should look around this area a bit more..."

I eye the crimson stains with unease and I shiver at the thought of finding the thing that hurt my friend. "W-why do we need to find that, Hic? It's clear that the murder weapon was the flagpole..."

The Ultimate Lucky Student looks pensive as he hears my question, "The murder weapon is the flagpole, huh... Regardless, I think we should look for the cause of the wounds. It may lead to a clue."

I wasn't keen on finding that thing. The idea of finding a bloodied weapon... but I guess... Hic is right...

"Let's have Toothless find it.", I suggest. The Night Fury, who had been seeing us investigate quietly, suddenly perked up at the mention of his name and bounded over to us excitedly.

"Why?", asks Hic, less excitedly.

"W-well.. I figured he would be able to track Sandy's blood on the weapon...?", I say, trying to explain my reasoning and praying to the Gods that my assumption about dragon noses was correct. To my surprise, Hiccup actually looked impressed by my bluff.

"Well.. he isn't a Tracker Class dragon... but... I'm surprised you

knew that, Jack."

Hiccup turns to Toothless and looks intently at the Night Fury's toxic green eyes for a long moment. Suddenly, Toothless nods at with an impressive speed, he darts away from us.

"He'll find it. I'm sure.", says the auburn-haired kid as he sees his friend run away. I can't help but to gawk at him, impressed. Did he... talk to Toothless without using words? That's...

"S-so... we should get back to our investigation...", says Hic as he notices that I'm looking at him, and I snap back to the present.

"Right, right! We should... uh... look around here, right?", Jack, keep it together. This is a life or death situation! You can't space out like this!

Perhaps I'm spacing out because of that? No, I'm just trying to make up excuses for myself.

Despite our efforts, we don't manage to find anything noteworthy in the rest of the Meeting Spot. The only thing of any importance is...

"I guess these footprints in the mud are the only clue here, huh...", says Hic as he walks next to me. I nod. I kneel in order to study the footprints.

There's two distinct set of footprints in the mud. Oddly enough, one of them appears to start from a bush to the north of the clearing we're in. The other, however, comes from the Rec Area.

"You think these are... Sandy's?", Hic asks quietly.

"Yeah...", it's the only thing that makes sense. So that means... the other set of footprints is... "These... must belong to the killer, too...", I say as I come to that conclusion.

...But, who left these footprints? If we identify these... I'll suppose we'll find the killer, right?

"Huh... but this is weird...", I hear Hic mumble. I turn to the brunette, and ask him what he meant.

Hiccup hesitates once more before speaking, unsure of what to say. "How do I put this...? Hmm... we both agree that these belong to the killer and Sandy, right?"

I nod.

"OK... but... who left these footprints, exactly? What I mean is... which of these are Sandy's and which are the killer's?"

I... don't know. Why is this important? "I dunno Hic. Why does it matter? I mean... if you want an answer...", I point to the footprints leaving the Meeting Spot "I'd say those are the killer's. I mean, he did have to leave the crime scene, right? Sandy... obviously didn't..."

I can see Hiccup flinch visibly, and I manage to catch a quiet 'sorry' from him. I shake my head a bit to show him I don't mind... I know he didn't mean it that way.

"It's just...", he begins, "If those footprints leaving the Meeting Spot are the killer's... then that makes the other footprints Sandy's... which then means... that he was waiting for the killer here, right?"

I see what Hic means know. "That IS weird... and those footprints started from the bush right? Does that mean Sandy was hiding?"

But... why? This just got more complicated... Just what happened last night?

The Ultimate Lucky Student looks at me dead in the eye, his eyes alight with determination all of a sudden. "I think... we should find out who left these footprints. It's clear they're important."

I agree with him. We should compare these with everyone's... maybe, in doing so, we'll even find the murderer!

Hic suddenly kneeling grabs my attention. What is he doing...? Soon enough I get an answer as he suddenly unties his right sneaker and shows its sole to me, his face a bit flustered.

"Just... to make sure... it wasn't me", he says without meeting my gaze, the sole of his sneaker matching neither of the footprints on the mud.

I chuckle, which makes him look at me. "Relax, Hic. I trust you." I say, to the embarrassment of the Viking. It's true. The thought of him being the culprit... never occurred to me. I just... had this feeling Hic wasn't it and this action just proved that to me.

I take off my left sneaker and show the sole of it to Hic. Of course, it matches none of the ones left on the mud, but I already knew that. I wink at the Ultimate Lucky Student's confused look and I smile teasingly, "Just making sure it wasn't me."

"Jerk...", the kid says with a pout, and I can't help but to laugh a bit at that. Hic then proceeds to entertain himself with his ElectroID, saying something along the lines of 'gotta add our footprints to the notes' as an excuse.

This guy... really brings out the best of me... huh.

"We need to get going...!", says Hic as he hastily puts away his ElectroID and his shoe back on. I copy him and nod at his words. We need more clues.

"Then let's head over to the Rec Area.", I say as I start walking towards the place, Hiccup tagging along behind me.

We'll... definitely find something!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

It seems like Jack is relying on me to figure out a solution. And I guess I'm sort of giving this 'I know what am I doing' vibe but to be honest? I'm just winging it. I really have no idea if my deductions are correct...

But seeing Jack act like his old self because of me... I guess I really am a sucker for bearing burdens no one asked me to bear, huh?

Nevertheless, we can't stop here. Even if I'm just winging it... I'm sure we'll find something out! I'm a Viking, after all. We're known for being stubborn, and I'll live up to that reputation.

Our investigation in the Rec Area is interrupted before it even begins by Aster, though. As we walk in, we find the Ultimate Survivalist leaning on a cottage's wall, deep in thought. I wonder what's eating him...?

"Yo, Bunny!", shouts Jack, which makes Aster jump with surprise. Even I have to laugh at the deja vu of the situation. Of course, Aster doesn't appreciate the humor of it, and he stomps over to us with a... displeased expression.

"'Course you would be goofing off even at a time like this...", says Aster to the whitette next to me, who drops the smile on his face and stiffens.

"I'm not goofing off... I'm investigating...", says Jack in a strained voice, glaring at the much taller male in front of him. Aster arches an eyebrow, as if he's evaluating Jack before slowly nodding his head.

"Well, at least you have ankle-biter here to set you straight...", says Aster as he looks at me. Great, more people expecting greatness out of me. Beautiful. "Can't say I'm making any progress, on my end...", says the Ultimate Survivalist with a conflicted look on his face.

"You... really want to help, don't you?", says Jack to the silver-haired boy, who huffs indignant.

" 'Course I want to! The bastard that did this to Sandy... he must pay for his crimes, ya hear?". Jack and I exchange a look. We... can trust Aster... I'm sure.

"Say, Aster... we know a way you can help us, actually...", I begin to say to the silver haired male, who looks at me with curiosity. We explain the footprint situation to Aster and by the end of it, he's looking at me with an odd expression.

"So... ya want me to check out people's shoes. That it...?", he says with an arched eyebrow.

"I-I know it sounds mundane... but it's important!", I say with conviction.

"And we don't have enough time to do that and investigate at the same time... so, please Bunny!", begs Jack.

"Never thought I'd see Frostbite beggin'... Guess it's THAT important, huh...", says Aster as mulls our petition over. "All right. I'll do it. Hope this isn't a waste of time..."

"Thanks, Aster." I say, truly grateful. This... is going to be a huge help.

"Don't mention it, kiddo.", he says with a gentle smile. "Well, guess I better get goin'. Take care of him, will ya Frostbite?", and with a ruffle of my hair and those words, Aster leaves.

...Why is he treating me like a little kid?! T-this is embarrassing!

I can see Jack is glaring at Aster as he leaves and I have to wonder... is he angry because Aster treated me like a kid? What an odd thing to be mad about...

"We should... uh, get back to investigating", I say to him, and he only nods stiffly. Jack is oddly quiet as we search high and low for any clues but we come up empty-handed. That, on top of Jack's scowl, makes the mood kind of awkward so Flynn appearing and approaching us makes me let out a sigh of relief.

"Yo, Haddock! Overland! How's it going?", says Flynn jovially.

"About as good as you'd expect...", I say truthfully.

Flynn simply nods, looking a lot more like his usual self, though he still seems jumpy, judging by the fact that he's looking around nervously.

"What brings you here, Flynn?", asks Jack, his scowl softening a little.

The Ultimate Thief kinda jumps at the question, but smiles upon seeing Jack. "Oh, nothing much, Jack. I actually wanted to show you something."

Jack and I exchange confused looks. The whitette looks wary as he asks, "What is it?"

Flynn looks troubled as he looks at me, "Er... when I meant 'you', I meant YOU, as in... only you, Jack..."

To say I wasn't hurt by the lack of trust would've been a lie. I guess... it's to be expected, but still...

The Ultimate Mystery, however, huffed in annoyance as he crossed his arms. "Hic is trustworthy, Flynn. He's helping me investigate, so he needs to know."

Flynn looks over me with an arched eyebrow before sighing. "Fine," he says as he slides his hand into his pocket, "If you say so, Jack."

He then produces a familiar... object from his pocket. It's an ElectroID... but caked with mud and smeared with blood...?

"Is that Sandy's?!", I shout with the realization.

Flynn nods as he brings the gadget back to life, showing the unmistakable face of our departed friend.

"W-where... did you... find this...?", says Jack, his eyes completely focused on the ElectroID.

"Over there, hidden in that bush.", says Flynn as he points at a bush near a cottage nonchalantly. I bring out my ElectroID quickly and I check out the map to confirm who's cottage is it.

"It's... Snotlout's...", I say slowly. There's no mistake. This cottage belongs to Snotlout... could it be...?

"Hic... the killer must have taken Sandy's ElectroID... right...?", says Jack with a nervous tone.

"If so, that's mighty suspicious of Snot, if you ask me.", adds Flynn as his brow furrows.

"I told you, did I not? There's no need to investigate.", says a cold, feminine voice out of nowhere. I whirl around to see that Elsa has joined us, her gaze judging me as she approaches us. "Mr. Jorgenson's guilt is obvious. You are all wasting your time." Gee... if looks could kill... or freeze...

"B-but we needed to confirm it... I mean... we just can't cast our judging recklessly... we're... risking our lives... we have to be certain.", I say lamely, not wanting to see her cold, probing gaze.

"And you just confirmed it, isn't that so? I don't see why we need to continue investigating, Mr. Haddock.", says Elsa, a slight grin on her face mocking me.

"N-not yet... we aren't done... we, uh... need to check some stuff out and...", Damn it. I'm losing my nerve here. Why is she so dead set on opposing me...?

"Are you saying you think Mr. Jorgenson is not guilty? Why, Mr. Haddock... I'd thought you'd be the first to condemn him.", she says with a frown on her face.

"It's not that...", It really isn't. I don't like Snotlout. He scares me. But even so... "I-I already told you... I need to be certain... I need to be 100% sure... or else... we'll all suffer..." And if I can prevent that from happening... I'll do everything I can.

Elsa's probing glare finally stops, and with a sigh, she turns to leave. "Despite your turmoil with Mr. Jorgenson, you choose to give him a second chance and not condemn him... Mr. Haddock... you're quite the kind fool. I hope that your... kindness doesn't destroy you in the Class Trial..."

And with that, she leaves.

Pfft? Me, kind? I never saw myself like that. It's just... in these kinds of things, one has to be as impartial as possible... even for jerks like Snotlout. That isn't... kindness... right?



And why would that... destroy me...?

"What's her deal?", says Jack with clear disdain in his voice.

"I dunno... but she's right about something. Things aren't looking bright for Snot.", adds Flynn as he crosses his arms.

It's true... Snotlout is looking pretty suspicious... but it's too early to jump to conclusions. We should resume the investigation. I turn to Flynn with a renewed resolve.

"Say, Flynn... could you loan us Sandy's ElectroID?", I ask the Ultimate Thief.

Both males look at me surprised. "Sure... I don't mind. But can I ask what for?", says Flynn as he hands me the device.

I stare at Jack before answering, gauging his reaction. "We're gonna check out his cottage. I... think we'll find a clue there."

As I expected, Jack's eyes darkened with sadness, but he doesn't object. Flynn looks at the whitette with a grimace, but nods. "Well, good luck with that. I'm gonna hit the trail again. Maybe I'll find something else."

I thank Flynn for his help, and as I watch his retreating back, I make my way towards Sandy's cottage slowly. As I pass Jack, I say in a low tone, "You don't... have to come... you know?"

The Ultimate Mystery shakes his head violently, and after rubbing his eyes with his forearm, he turns to follow me, his eyes still sad but more alive. "No. I'm coming. We... I have to do this."

"Yeah...", is all I can say. There's... nothing much to say. We approach the cottage slowly, but in silence, the only sound coming from the door opening after I use the ElectroID to gain access to... our friend's cottage.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

The first thing I notice upon entering the cottage is the drawings. Sketches upon sketches. Everywhere. On the floor, on the walls and even some in the bed. The second thing I notice is the decor. Everything, to the sheets in the bed to the small light on the night stand, was moon themed. And even though the drawings were thrown around everywhere, the rest of his cottage was well organized.

Undisturbed. As if he was never here.

I walked farther into the cottage and picked up a random drawing. My talent must be Ultimate Bad Luck, because the first one I picked up took my breath away in a bad way.

A sketch of us four. Hiccup, Astrid, Merida and me, standing shoulder to shoulder, smiling. Even though it was a simple sketch, with obvious errors here and there, there was a noticeable attention to

detail. To the way Hiccup's crooked smile showed how nervous he was to be around people, to the way I was leaning on both the Viking and Merida with my arms slung over their shoulders... Even Merida's scowl at my antics and Astrid's laughter were palpable.

I had to choke a sob. Not now. I can do this... I will not... falter. There'll be time for this... later.

"Uh... Jack?", says Hic tentatively, in a hushed tone. I turn to see a pair of green eyes looking at me worriedly. "Yeah, Hic?", I say as cheerfully as I can. It comes out like a croak.

"Are those...?", he says as he points over to side of the bed. I follow his finger and I notice it too. Muddy footprints. I quickly follow them and I find that they continue under the bed. It's hard to see anything because it's dark under there, but after looking around for a bit, I grab ahold of something.

A pair of shoes. Caked in mud on the soles... and... stained with blood.

"Are these...?", Hic begins.

"No doubt about it." I finish for him, "Sandy's shoes."

"But what are they doing here...?", says Hic. "I mean... we thought the killer took them but... if they're here..."

Another mystery. I'm honestly getting sick of this. Still... this is important. "I don't know what this means Hic, but I think we can at least say for sure that somehow, Sandy's shoes ended up here after the crime happened."

"Wait... maybe...", says the Ultimate Lucky Student before shaking his head, "No, nevermind.", he then proceeds to eye me with worry. Do I... look that bad...?

"Ahem... I'll... check out things over here... yeah", and with that, he excuses himself to the other side of the cottage sheepishly, awkwardly stepping around the drawings on the floor.

He's acting too cautiously around me. Even more than usual. I guess he really doesn't want me to be upset. But to be honest... I kinda miss his sarcastic side a little. His witty repertoire would be more welcome right now. Still, I can't get angry at him for acting like this... I... probably would act the same way.

My heart isn't on the search, as I try to ignore all the things in the room-Sandy's room... my friend's room- In an effort to not break down. I look under the bed once more and to my surprise, I find something else. A book.

I slowly retrieve it from under the bed and I take a look at the cover. It's a sketchbook, but it has a label that reads "My Diary". Is this...?

"What did you find?"

Hic's sudden question makes me jump. The brunette approaches me with a quizzical look as he eyes the book in my hands.

"Uh... did you find anything?", I ask, before telling him what I found.

"I asked you something first", he says with a roll on his eyes, but upon realizing he said something sarcastic, he covers his mouth and blushes, which honestly makes me laugh. My laughter only makes him blush harder. Damn it... no need for these thoughts right now.

"It's... his diary...", I say as I wave the sketchbook in front of him. Hic's eyes widen with realization at my words. He approaches me slowly, his eyes moving from the book to me.

"Are you... Shall we... uh... look inside?", he asks as he wrings his hands together.

I look at the cover of the book once more. I can do this... Right. With a sigh, I flip open the sketchbook and as I start flipping through the pages, Hic walks up next to me in order to see.

There's not much in the sketchbook. Apparently, he started this diary as soon as we got here, seeing how there's nothing before our first day in the camp. And yet, all the things written and drawn on the pages send surges of pain in my heart. Seeing how much fun he was having with us... how grateful he was that we didn't judge him for his disability... how worried he was about me and my dreams... made me miss him even more.

At one point, Hic grabbed me in a one-armed hug, for which I was grateful.

As we read the last entry of the diary, however, things turned... weird. The last sentences read so:

\*\*\*"Monobear appeared before us today and made his move! Apparently there's a traitor among us? I can't believe my friends would work with that fiend! But... what if... one of them believes the villain and they try to harm Jack, Hiccup, Merida or Astrid?\*\*\*

\*\*\*I couldn't take it! I must stop anything like that from happening! But I don't know how...\*\*\*

\*\*\*Perhaps the strange book I found here has something that will help me? I don't know who it belongs too... it says that it belongs to a 'Sanderson Mansnoozie' but the contents of the book are written in a weird language that I can't read... I need to figure out what it says before Monobear finds it! Should I hide it...?\*\*\*

\*\*\*Aaah! This is annoying! I think I'll take a walk outside to clear my mind. Who knows...? Maybe I'll figure something out!\*\*\*

This was the last entry in the diary. So this must be last thing he wrote... He never returned here to write out more.

"A... weird book?", says Hiccup, his brow furrowed in confusion. "I searched all over the place and didn't find anything..."

Closing the sketchbook and putting it on the bed, I said, "Me neither... You think the killer or Monobear took it...?"

"No... I don't think so. The cottage was pretty much undisturbed before we got here... at least, it seemed like that.", says the Viking says with his arms crossed.

"Then... Sandy must have hidden it somewhere...", I conclude. But... what does that book have to do with this...? Somehow... I don't think it has anything to do with this crime... and yet... it seems important.

"Do you want to look for it?", asks Hic.

"No...", I answer with hesitation. I do want to search for it but... "We don't hav the time for that... Let's look for clues elsewhere..."

"If you say so..." says Hiccup with his eyes cast downward.

"Say, Hic?"

"Yes, Jack?"

"Lighten up, OK? I... your sarcastic barbs help me more than your moodiness.", I say to the brunette with a smirk. Or what I hope is a smirk.

"...And here I thought the sensitive schtick was helping you...", mumbles the Viking, still not looking at me. I push him playfully in order to make him look at me, and the almost-bordering-on-inoffensive glare I get makes me smile genuinely.

"That's more like it."

"Mental note", says Hic, "If you want to make Jackson Overland happy, be mean to him."

"You make me sound like a masochist.", I say with a scoff.

"Are you?"

"Hic, why do you want to know that?", I ask teasingly before I can stop myself.

"Wow, OK. No. Monobear doing the whole innuendo thing was bad enough. Let's... get going, OK?" And with that, the little Viking leaves the cottage way faster than needed.

Did I... mess up? But we were just bantering like usual... right?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

...I may have overreacted a bit. But I didn't want Jack's double-meaning dialogue to give me any funny ideas. I had to concentrate on the case.

We made our way to the Rec Area to investigate but we didn't found any important leads, nor anyone was of much help. The only ones that provided helpful information were Astrid and Merida, who were busy

trying to find Snotlout, without much success.

"It's as if he had vanished without a trace.", said Astrid with a worried expression.

"Ya said it. He's harder to find than Nessie, that brute.", added Merida with an exasperated look.

"Still... we need to find him! I think... he's vital to this case.", I said almost... no, fully certain that I was right. The way Snotlout was acting was definitely suspicious so he must know something.

"If ya say so, Hiccup. Guess we better get going and find 'im. I feel like we're running out of time...", says Merida with a fiery look in her eyes. "Let's get goin' Astrid!", and with that, she took the blonde by the arm, almost dragging her away.

"Good luck!", shouted Jack enthusiastic and obviously enjoying the sight of Astrid being pulled around.

But... time...? It's true... the investigation started a little after 7 AM and now it's almost noon. I doubt Monobear is going to wait any longer. We have to hurry!

Wordlessly, we made our way to the supermarket in hopes of finding a lead.

What we found was something quite different. Monobear himself.

"Helloooo there! How do you find the sleuthing I prepared for you? Are you entertained? Excited? I despairingly hope so! Puhuhuhu!", said the bear with a mocking giggle.

"What... are you doing here?!", shouts the whitette at the Headmaster, but like always, the bear remains undaunted, as if our outbursts of emotion were nothing to him.

"Chill, Frosty. Oh, that was a good one! Tee hee...", the Headmaster laughs at his own pun before continuing, "I'm just here to do an inventory check! Someone has to keep count of the things you bastards use in the camp, y'know?"

Wait... things we've used in the camp...? Does he mean...?

"Even the things that were used in the murder? You keep count of those?!", my voice quivers with excitement. Maybe... this will be our lead...!

"Hmm? Yeah, I do count those too. But why do you ask?", the red eye of the Headmaster lighting up is already a bad sign, "If you think I'm going to tell you WHO took any of the things used in the murder, then I'm happy to disappoint you! I'm not telling!", and in a childish display, Monobear turns around and slaps his rear at me.

It bothers me more than it should. Really, what is he, 5?!

"Can you at least tell me what was used in the crime?!", I say exasperated, running a hand through my mop of hair.

"I forgot. Please try again later." says the Headmaster, enjoying toying with me.

But before I can even form a retort, a heavy set of foot steps makes me turn around. Running at me is Toothless, with something large in his mouth. Is that...?

"Looks like Toothless found it, Hic.", says Jack with a grimace.

Toothless drops the object in front of my feet, looking proud. I rub his snout before proceeding to check the object.

It's longer than I thought. It looks like a lance, but incredibly ornate, it's silver surface engraved with carvings in Nordic language. There's blood at the tip of the lance, which should be obvious, but there's also mud there as well. The lance itself is freakishly long, though! It's almost 2 meters long! This thing... looks hard to wield. There's another thing in this lance that catches my attention... on the bottom of the spear is a a long cord attached to the lance. The cord itself is long as well, bordering on 5 meters. Just... what is this?

"O brave Vikings, what have you here is that of which the Valkyries sing on their songs. For what you have brought is none other but the legendary spear, Gugnir!", says Monobear suddenly in a stuffy tone.

"Or at least, an imitation. But hey, I'd say it's a pretty good one, fit only for the best warriors, don't you think? Nyohohoho!", finishes the Headmaster, destroying any sense of wonder I had for the weapon in front of me. I should've known the Headmaster was pulling a fast one on me...

Still, Monobear was being truthful about something. This thing looked impossible to use... and yet... it had blood on it, so...

"So this is the murder weapon...?", says Jack as he kneels to look closely to the lance.

"Mmmmaybe! But that's not important! You know what is important? It's time!", says the Headmaster with a grin, and before I can ask him anything, he disappears.

A buzz in a nearby monitor confirms my fears. Monobear appears on it shortly, still sipping that eternal lemonade.

"Um, you know... I've grown tired of waiting, so like! Let's begin the Class Trial! Please proceed to Monobear Tower, which can be found down a path to the left of the restaurant, immediately! Let's make this Class Trial a memorable one, shall we?"

Panic started to set in after that message. We... aren't ready yet! We still don't know what the heck is going on! And yet...!

"H-Hic... we have to get going...", says Jack, his face tense. He tugs on my sleeve and that snaps me out of my panic attack. I nod at him before I start walking towards the appointed place stiffly, Jack and Toothless following me closely.

As we went down the unfamiliar path that I swore just appeared right now (After all, we looked everywhere on our stay here and we never found this path), my heart was racing so fast that I thought I would have a heart attack on the spot. And yet, I kept walking. Through the tree tops, I managed to see that mysterious tower that was visible through the entire camp.

It fascinated me, that tower. It rose tall into the clouds, so tall that the top wasn't even visible. And yet, despite it's size, we never found a way towards it. Until today. Knowing that this tower had to do with our life-and-death situation made me scared of it now, but we had no choice, we had to go forward.

Toothless' worried croon made me realize we were near now. It wasn't even a hundred steps before we reached a clearing, where the base of the tower was. The clearing we were in was different from the other ones. This one was surrounded by tall cliff walls, and the ground was solid granite instead of dirt. The base of the tower, like most things in this camp, was Monobear-themed, the Headmaster modelling the base in the shape of his head.

Standing in front of the 'door' (which was where Monobear's mouth would be), were the others, already gathered. They all looked weary, nervous, confused, scared and well... miserable. I guess Jack and I look the same. But it was understandable.

Soon enough, Monobear himself appeared, which already worsened our falling mood.

"Looks like everyone is here and ready for a healthy dose of despair-", began the monochromatic bear before abruptly stopping. "Hmm?! Hey! Where's Snotty?!"

True enough, a quick look around revealed the fact that Snotlout Jorgenson was nowhere to be seen.

"We looked for him everywhere but... we didn't find him.", said Merida, defeated.

"Grrr! This won't do! Won't do at all! I have always had a perfect attendee record and I won't let Snotty ruin it! Raaaawr!", and with that cartoony roar, the Headmaster vanished.

Roughly 10 minutes later, sounds of shouting and obscenities came from the path we all had used to arrive. We all turned to see what was the commotion and we were treated to the sight of Snotlout, the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, being dragged by the neck of his shirt effortlessly by the much smaller Monobear, despite all the trashing of the much bigger boy.

"Enough! If you don't stay put! I'll punish you by plucking out your eyebrow hairs one by one!", said the Headmaster to the dark brown-haired male, who reluctantly joined our group, not without receiving a few glares from some of the group, Jack included.

"Now... we're behind schedule, so to speak, because of a certain trouble maker... but without further ado...! Let's start this Class Trial", said Monobear as he opened his arms wide, the door to the tower opening slowly. "Please proceed to the courtroom by taking the

charming elevator in front of you! See ya there!", and with that, he vanished, the dark interior of the elevator staring at us, beckoning us to enter.

Taking a deep breath in order to try to calm down, I watched as everyone entered the elevator one by one, the Twins and Flynn practically pushing Snotlout in. Aster lingered a bit before entering, shooting me a thumbs up before entering. Does that mean he...?

Soon enough, Jack, Toothless and I were the only ones left. Without saying a word, Jack gave me squeeze in my shoulder and a tense smile before walking towards the elevator, disappearing into the darkness.

With a courage I didn't know I had, I stepped into the elevator. Toothless soon followed, and with a finality, the doors of the elevator slowly closed behind us. Soon after, the lights came up and a surprisingly spacious room was revealed, spacious enough for all of us and a Night Fury to stand comfortably in. A slight lurch told us that the elevator had started moving, but without any indicator, I wasn't able to tell how fast or how high we were.

Still, no one talked in the ascent. Despite how long it took to reach our destination, no one broke the silence. All around me, I saw faces focused and in deep thought. We... were all trying to ready ourselves for the Class Trial...

The elevator came to a stop.

Soon enough... this game of lies and truth, this game of betrayal and trust, this game of life and death... this game of Hope and Despair... will begin.

And as the doors to the courtroom opened slowly, I realized that there was no going back.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alright! The next chapter will be the Class Trial, and it will be a whooper! I'm going to try to write out the whole thing in a single chapter, so I may take a while.<strong>

\*\*Speaking of chapter lengths... I just realized I like writting shorter chapters... as in 2k-3k word chapters. Would that bother you guys? I'm more comfortable writing in those lengths but you ARE my audience!\*\*

\*\*In any case, your reviews give me strength. I appreciate them from the bottom of my latino heart. See ya later!\*\*

#### 14. 1 - Chapter 1 - Class Trial

\*\*Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - Class Trial\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Whew! This is it! The big one! Hope you enjoy it... it's extra large! I had fun writing this... like a lot! So I hope you have



fun too!<strong>

**\*\*PS. If you guys have an AO3 account, you will find that this chapter has a special bonus that can only be viewed there because of the site's features... which is a bummer but oh well. You won't really miss anything story or content-wise. It's just something... I did for fun and flair!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

The doors gave away to reveal a giant, circular room. If I had to describe the room... the best way I could do so was with the word 'gaudy'.

Red velvet curtains hung from the wall all the way to the floor, and the walls were lined with golden pillars with checkered tiles in between them. Red velvet carpet covered the entire floor and in the middle of the room, also arranged in a circular motion, were booths with cruddy drawings of us in the floor. There was even a big one for Toothless.

Overseeing this circle of booths was the most outrageous throne I've ever seen, made entirely out of gold and fitted with red cushions. And of course, Monobear was sitting on it, looking at us smugly. Said bear beckoned us to come in further with his paw and we cautiously left the elevator and walked into the courtroom proper.

This was it. No ifs or buts.

"Welcome! Did you enjoy the ride? I'm sure you did! I mean, I spared every expense in making that elevator but I think it's still amazing, don't you think?", our Headmaster greeted us with a nonsensical tirade. Of course, everyone was too tense to humor the bear. Seeing no reaction from us, Monobear moved on.

"Very well! I see you're set and ready to go, so let's fire up this thing and get started! Please take your corresponding booth! You'll know which one belongs to you by looking at the totally accurate artistic depictions of you done by me!", said Monobear as he pointed at the booths with enthusiasm.

I quickly spotted my own booth (Monobear's doodle of me greatly exaggerated my crooked teeth), and I walked to it hesitantly. Slowly, everyone got in place; Going from my right, Tooth was next to me, followed by a shared booth with Tuffnut and Ruffnut, then Flynn, Elsa, Peter, Fishlegs, Merida, Anna, Jack, Aster, Toothless, North, Astrid, Rapunzel, Snotlout and finally... ending with an empty booth to my left. That booth didn't hold a person, instead... it held a sign post with a black and white picture of Sandy, a crude red 'X' painted over it.

Monobear caught me looking at it and his sneer increased tenfold. "Hey! Just because he's dead, it doesn't mean he should be excluded! I bet he wouldn't want to miss the big event! So, I put a picture of him in his place! You know how in some cultures, people believe that cameras and photos can steal a person's soul? This way, you could say Sandy is accompanying us in spirit! Puhuhuhu!"

The trial hadn't even started and I already had a headache. Ugh... this rotten stuffed animal was being unbearable.

"Just shut up already.", snarled Jack, clearly not amused at the bear's antics. Monobear continued unperturbed.

"Right. Right. The heart-thumping and super-cool-and-exciting Class Trial is NOW IN SESSION!", shouted the bear as he took a seat.

"Now then... let's begin with a simple explanation of the Class Trial.", began Monobear with a monotone voice, as if he were reading a script. "During a Class Trial, you guys will debate and argue in order to figure out who the Blackened is! If you guys figure out whodunit and vote for that person and it's correct... only the Blackened will get punished! But if you pick the wrong persoooooon... the Blackened will leave, and you guys will be punished!"

"Oh, and, um... you guys HAVE to vote. Abstaining from voting is punishable by my law. S-so don't even think about bailing on me after you a-already undressed me and left me bear naked...!", said Monobear as he faked to be turned on, a blush inexplicably appearing on the stuffed animal. Seriously, what the heck?

"A question, before we start, if I may?", said Elsa, suddenly. "I'm assuming you're the judge of the trial? Does this mean you know who the killer is?"

Monobear looked at the Ultimate Figure Skater with a smile. "Of course I know who did it! How else would I be able to give a fair ruling if I didn't know that? Oh but if you think that I will give you a clue, my cute bear lips are sealed! Puhuhu!"

That... makes sense, actually. No doubt Monobear caught the culprit on camera. Knowing this does little to ease my nerves, unfortunately.

"Now then, begin already! Present your arguments!", demanded the monochromatic bear.

The fact that my hands were sweating clearly told me that I was nervous. My heart hammered away in my chest. This... whole thing would decide our fates. But...

"How... should we start...?", asked Rapunzel, voicing my question.

"Yeah, we don't exactly have any experience with this, so." said Tuffnut, a disinterested look in his face. "Where do we begin?", finished Ruffnut, equally disinterested.

"How about we start by voting already?", said Elsa, looking at us with a cold gaze before zeroing on Snotlout, who flinched. "We already know he's the culprit."

"Oh my! Voting Time already?! Well... if you insist...", shouted Monobear, bring his paws over his snout in order to hide his mischievous smile.

"HOLD THE PHONE!", shouted Snotlout. "I didn't fucking kill anyone!"

"But you're clearly the most suspicious person in this room. And you have voiced your\*\* intent to kill\*\*. So you're our only and most likely suspect.", pressured Elsa, actually leaning a bit on her booth as she spoke.

"I-I want a lawyer...!", said Snotlout as he covered his head with two beefy hands and to my surprise, he actually started to tear up a bit.

"DE-NIED!", shouted Monobear joyfully.

"Settle down, you two.", intervened North, silencing the pair with his authoritative tone. "We're not starting voting time without discussing incident first, yes?"

"I agree with North, sis.", said Anna. "We should make sure he's the culprit before we jump to any conclusions."

Elsa squinted her eyes with annoyance and muttered under her breath, "You're only saying that because Mr. Haddock said it."

Great. Really scoring brownie points with her. That's me, making friends everywhere.

"S-so!", said Fishlegs suddenly, "Maybe we should start with how... um, Sandy died?"

That's a good starting point, actually.

"According to the Monobear file", began Peter as he scanned the device with a bored tone, "Sandy died due to-"

"Stab wounds!", shouted Tuffnut, excited, "\*\*\*He was stabbed to death!\*\*" Probably with a knife or something." Ruffnut rudely interjected by shoving his brother, "Don't be an idiot! He obviously died from the \*\*cut on his neck!\*\* You can see it in the file, clear as day!"

"Uh... guys?", I said before they started throwing down, "That's wrong. The Monobear File clearly says that he died from strangulation." Honestly, these two... did they even read the File?

"Oh"

"We didn't actually read the file."

Oh Hel's skirts. These two...!

"So... Mr. Sandy died from \*\*strangulation\*\*?", said Rapunzel crestfallen.

"'Fraid so, Punzie", answered Flynn, looking grim.

"So what's up with the wounds, then? You sure they weren't the cause of death?", asked Merida, deep in thought with her arms crossed.

I shook my head. "The Monobear File clearly says that the cause of death is \*\*strangulation\*\*."

"What if Monobear is lying?" said Astrid, suddenly confrontational.

"Hey! Don't talk about me as if I weren't here! It's very rude!", shouted the Headmaster as he flailed his arms around in childish anger. "I'll have you know the Monobear file contains the truth and only the truth!"

"So then, what about the wounds, ankle-biter?", said Aster after hearing Monobear's tirade.

"I... think they were inflicted after Sandy died...", said Jack before I could answer, a finger on his temple as he spoke. "It's... the only thing that makes sense if they're not the cause of death."

"So, what's the murder weapon?", asked Tooth, looking at all of us with expectantly.

"Looking at the state of the body, it should be obvious.", said Elsa, apparently willing to participate this time around, though her eyes never left Snotlout as she spoke. "We found the corpse hung by the neck, didn't we? I assume the killer \*\*hanged\*\* Mr. Onirico and simply waited until he died."

"How horrible...!", shouted Rapunzel as she looked a little pale.

"And then they went and stabbed his corpse...?!", said North, looking outraged.

"The hell, Snotlout?! How could you do that?!", shouted Ruffnut.

"E-ENOUGH I DIDN'T DO IT!", screamed the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, close to tears.

"But... is that how it really happened? The killer hung Sandy, lowered the body, stabbed him, and then hung him again? Doesn't that seem odd and convoluted and risky?", I interjected.

"Don't forget we're dealin' with Snotface here, ankle-biter." said Aster as he glared at the teary-eyed teen.

"Not the brightest bub in the pack, that's for sure...", commented Merida as Flynn nodded.

"P-please... I didn't do it... Stop...", and for the first time in my stay here, I felt pity for Snotlout. He actually looked miserable.

Elsa, however, took this chance to attack. "Then tell us, Mr. Jorgenson, where were you during the crime? I've actually gotten alibis for everyone except for you."

But, that's a lie. She never got an alibi from me or Jack... why would she lie like that? Was she trying to pressure Snotlout to talk?

"I... I was in my room when it happened.", he offered, feebly. Elsa merely scoffed.

"Really now? Then can you explain why were you \*\*soggy, covered in mud and looking worse for wear\*\*?"

Snotlout's face dropped as he heard the silver-haired girl's question. "Well, t-that's-"

"I can tell you why." interrupted Elsa, a smug smile on her lips, "Because you were at the crime scene." A stunned silence fell over the courtroom as she spoke. "You will all recall that it \*\*rained\*\* yesterday..."

"Sandy's body was wet and there were muddy footprints everywhere...", said Jack as he held a hand to his temple, his gaze unfocused.

Elsa nodded. "So it stands to reason that the killer would be anyone who is in the same conditions, yes?" The Ultimate Figure Skater's gaze suddenly sharpened as she focused her glare on Snotlout. "Mr. Jorgenson, you're the killer! Admit it!"

"N-no! I... DIDN'T DO IT!", was all Snotlout could say as his knees visibly wobbled.

Elsa's eyes held nothing but contempt for the Ultimate Heavy Lifter. "Then, can you explain why you were found in such a state?"

At this question, the dark-haired teen tensed. "I-I can't...", he said softly as he hung his head low, his face hidden from all of us.

"I rest my case". Said Elsa as she stood up straight after leaning on her booth once again during her interrogation.

Flynn merely whistled, North nodding in approval.

"S-so Snotlout really did it...?", asked Fishlegs, apparently breathless from Elsa's attack on Snotlout.

"Looks that way..." said Aster as he looked at the Ultimate Figure Skater with new-found admiration.

"So... is it OK if we start the voting already?", asked Rapunzel, looking at the hunched figure of the burly teen.

This...

This didn't feel right...

Snotlout was the killer because he was wet and dirty? He was at the crime scene based on these facts? But that's just circumstantial evidence. And yet, everything points to Snotlout. Even Sandy's ElectroID, which was removed from the crime scene, was found near Snotlout's cottage. So... did he really do it?

Or... is this the true culprit's trap? Is Snotlout being framed? By who?

But I can't prove that right now. If I just say he's being framed

without any evidence, they won't listen to me. Maybe... I should start by discrediting Elsa's argument.

But how? Her whole argument rides on the fact **\*\*that Snotlout was at the crime scene\*\***. If only I could prove **\*\*who\*\*** was at the crime scene.

...Wait! That's it!

...I can't believe I'm defending Snotlout...

"Wait!", I shout louder than I intend to, but I get the desired effect. Everyone is looking at me now. Right, OK. "Are we sure Snotlout was at the crime scene when the crime happened?"

Elsa's face became an emotionless mask as she heard my question. "Mr. Haddock, please don't ask such meaningless questions."

"I'm sorry, Hic, but she's right.", says Jack, his face filled with subdued anger as he glared at Snotout, his knuckles white as he gripped the edges of his booth.

"Yeah, Hiccup, just accept it. Snotlout did it.", said Astrid avoiding my face. Was she embarrassed of me?

"No, I won't! B-because... I can prove Snotlout wasn't at the crime scene!", or so I hope.

The atmosphere suddenly turned charged with expectation as everyone's attention focused on me. Elsa merely arched an eyebrow. "Oh? And how will you do that?"

Right, here goes nothing... "Aster.", I faced the Ultimate Survivalist. "Did you get everyone's **\*\* footprints\*\*** like we asked you?"

Aster's eyes suddenly widened. "Oh yeah!", the teen fumbled for his ElectroID. "Got everyone's but Snotface's here." With Odin's blessing and perhaps my Ultimate Lucky Student talent activating, I managed to catch Aster's ElectroID as he threw it at me.

"What's this about, Mr. Haddock?", asked Elsa, confused.

"Well, you argue that Snotlout is the killer because he was at the crime scene, right?", I said as I looked at the detailed drawings of everyone's footprint samples stored in the device, "Because he was wet and muddy, right? So naturally, if he was at the crime scene, he would've had **\*\* left his footprints in the mud\*\***, correct?"

"Get to the point already!", shouted Tuffnut, exasperated.

"Yes, your ramblings are wasting our time, Mr. Haddock." Wow. Elsa agreeing with Tuff...

"Well, there were **\*\*two sets of footprints\*\*** left in the mud at the crime scene. If we can figure out who they belong to using these footprint samples Aster collected for me, we'll be able to figure out who the killer is!", I said as I showed the device to Elsa.

"Whoa!", shouted Flynn, impressed, "Nicely done, Hiccup!"

"Indeed! That is what I call dedication!", applauded North.

"I was the one who got 'em, y'know...", mumbled Aster.

"And for that, I thank you." I really had to suppress my smirk as I saw Elsa's stunned face. "Alright everyone, line up. We're gonna compare your footprints with the ones from the crime scene."

One by one, everyone compared their footwear's footprints to the ones from the crime scene; from Astrid's combat boots, to Rapunzel's... bare feet, to my own sneakers, everyone went to through the test. Jack and I already knew that one of the footprints in the crime scene belonged to Sandy... but the other one...

Finally, Snotlout's turn came. The Ultimate Heavy Lifter looked tense as I started the comparison.

...To my relief... Snotlout's shoes DIDN'T match with the other footprint in the crime scene. But... Oh Gods... oh Gods...!

"So, what are the results, Mr. Haddock?", asked Elsa, unusually tense.

"Snotlout's footprints... didn't match.", I said, just like I had hoped. I would have relished Elsa's expression if it weren't for the thing I just had uncovered. I vaguely heard Snotlout sigh in relief.

"Hic...? What's wrong?", asked Jack as he saw my face, worried.

"Did you find somethin' else?", asked Merida. I stiffly nodded.

"The thing is...\*\* none of the footprints matched the ones in the crime scene\*\*.", and just like that, everyone froze. But... that wasn't the only thing I found out. "Except for one. Sandy's footprints."

"But what is wrong about that?", asked Peter puzzled at my behavior.

"Yeah... Mr. Sandy was at the crime scene when he... died, right?", said Rapunzel.

"Yeah b-but...", I paused to gulp and consider if I should say what I found out. There were two sets of footprints in the crime scene. One of them started randomly from the bush and never left the crime scene, the other started in the crime scene but actually exited the Meeting Spot. "Sandy's footprints... match \*\*the ones that leave the Meeting Spot.\*\*"

Silence. That's all that existed as everyone slowly digested my findings. It didn't make any sense, yet our clues told us this:

Our murder victim actually left the crime scene.

...Just what on Thor's name is going on?!

"Hiccup, are you sure?!", asked North, clearly bewildered.

"There must be a mistake...", said Tooth, looking at North, worried.

"So... it really was Snotlout then?", asked Ruffnut.

"But his footprints didn't match...", said Anna in a whisper.

"And now there's a footprint that doesn't belong to anyone and apparently our corpse walked away from the crime scene?", said Flynn with his brow furrowed.

"B-but that's impossible...! Corpses can't walk...!" shouted Fishlegs.

"Eeek! Zombie attack?!", said Monobear, obviously enjoying our confusion. Please, don't talk now. You'll only make things worse.

"Do you see what you've caused, Mr. Haddock?", said Elsa confrontationally, "Your so called evidence has thrown this debate into chaos!"

None of this makes sense. And yet, Aster's evidence isn't faulty. So... what am I doing wrong? Am I overlooking something?

...First, I need to calm down and analyze these inconsistencies one by one. Maybe that way, I'll figure out something. Alright... I'll tackle the most outrageous thing first.

Something clearly impossible has happened; a corpse left footprints on the mud and left the crime scene. Yet the clues tell us that's what happened. So then... how did that come to pass? Clearly, a corpse can't move, and yet those footprints still appeared.

I lock eyes with Jack, who is also looking at me, despite how obvious it is that he's thinking about this too.

Looking at him, my mind gears start to shift. Memories of our investigation return to me. A \*\*way for Sandy to leave those footprints\*\*... \*\*Sandy's cottage\*\*... the \*\*state of the corpse\*\*...

That's it!

"I think... I know how Sandy left those footprints...", I begin, uncertain. Suddenly, Jack's eyes light up with understanding and with a nod, he starts speaking too.

"During our investigation, we found \*\*Sandy's ElectroID\*\*..."

"I was the one who found it", supported Flynn.

"Right." I nodded at Jack before continuing. "It was found at the Rec Area, far away from the body."

"We assume the killer \*\*stole\*\* it...", said Jack, picking up from where I left.

Everyone's eyes shifted to Flynn, but the Ultimate Thief quickly put up his hands. "Hey! I don't pillage corpses! Besides, do you think



the killer would've given that clue to you guys? C'mon!"

"In a-any case,", I said before I lost my train of thought, "We used it to investigate Sandy's cottage."

"Yeah, and in there we found something quite peculiar...", said Jack as he closed his eyes and crossed his arms, "You see... Sandy's ElectroID wasn't \*\*the only thing missing\*\* from the body."

"That's right", I said as I put a hand under my chin, "Sandy's body... was missing it's \*\*shoes\*\*. And we found his shoes\*\* IN the cottage\*\*."

"So how did Sandy's \*\*ElectroID and shoes end up far away from him\*\* and how did a \*\*corpse leave footprints behind\*\* even though he wore no shoes?", said Jack as he asked that leading question.

I smiled. Thanks to him... I managed to figure out this mystery! "The answer is simple. If it's impossible for a corpse to move, then there's only one other explanation. The killer not only stole Sandy's ElectroID, he also stole his shoes! And so, he left those footprints... by wearing them! And using Sandy's ElectroID..."

"The killer\*\* entered Sandy's cottage\*\* and \*\*hid the shoes there!\*\*", finished Jack, excitedly.

"And... that's the truth behind the corpse's apparent post-mortem locomotion.", I said with a smile, to everyone's stunned faces.

Once again, Flynn whistled, his eyes wide.

"That was some impressive teamwork there!", shouted Tooth, clapping with excitement. Both Jack and I blushed at the compliment. I don't know what... happened back there but I could get used to this kind of joint reasoning.

"Ew.", interrupted Monobear, "If you guys are done messing around, I suggest you guys continue with the class trial. Before I lose my patience AND my lunch."

"So... where does that leave us?", asked Astrid.

"Yeah. I don't understand why the killer had to use such an elaborate trick.", said Anna biting her thumb, "I mean, it makes sense, but why?"

"And what about the \*\*other footprint\*\*?", asked Peter.

Right. The other footprint... We still don't know who it belongs to... and I don't think I can identify it with what we have right now. I should probably return to that one later. But as the reason why the killer took this course of action... I can answer that.

"Well, I have no idea to who the mystery footprint belongs to, but I think we can agree it isn't Snotlout's". Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Snotlout reluctantly smiling at my defense. "But as for why the killer decided to wear Sandy's shoes and move them... I think it's obvious that the Blackened is trying to \*\*confuse us\*\*. Throw us off."

Yeah. That's it. So far, the true culprit has hidden it's identity well. Planting fake clues using the victim's shoes, using a different shoe type when they committed the crime to hide their presence... they even went so far as to try to frame Snotlout for the crime. All to shield themselves.

"Well, they did good, because I have no idea what's going on.", complained Ruffnut.

"This black hearted devil certainly \*\*planned this crime thoroughly\*\*.", said North as he rubbed his chin.

"I have to agree", said Elsa as she let out a puff of air, "This crime was \*\*planned so well\*\*... it even made me jump to conclusions and made me think Mr. Jorgenson did it."

"The bastard probably \*\*planned\*\* to\*\* lure Sandy\*\* as well... Just how much did the killer thought about this?", said Flynn, annoyed.

But wait...

It's true that the killer is crafty, but... they planned everything? No, that's...

"Actually, that's wrong.", I said suddenly. This crime... this killing... wasn't planned. Because there was no way the killer would've know about the victim's plans for the night. In fact, none of us knew until we investigated Sandy's cottage. "The killer didn't lure Sandy nor was this crime planned. Sure, the killer's trickery and cover-up work was well thought... but the murder itself? It was impossible to plan for it."

"What do you mean, Hiccup?", asked Merida.

"When we investigated Sandy's cottage, we found his diary. In it, Sandy wrote that he would take a walk to clear his mind.", I paused to breathe, "Nowhere in the diary does he mention he's going to meet someone. A killer can't plot to kill a victim if they don't even know that the victim was going to show up. It can't be done, at all."

"Unless you have a sword that can show you the future! Y'know, like in that famous JRPG for that famous family-friendly console of 2007, Xeno-!", interrupted Monobear, but North silenced him before he could finish his random outburst.

"If what yer sayin' is true, ankle-biter," said Aster, "then why did Sandy wind up dead? Yer sayin' this murder wasn't planned and yet someone clearly prepared themselves to kill. Sandy himself proves that."

"And yet, Hiccup is indeed correct," interjected Peter. "If Sandy's walk to the crime scene was impromptu, then the killer couldn't have possibly conspired to kill Sandy, because they couldn't have possibly known about Sandy's movements before the crime happened."

So what gives? The killer obviously prepared to kill someone... they got a spear and a different pair of shoes than the ones they normally

use to hide their presence...

"W-what if... the killer was aiming to kill **\*\*someone else\*\***, but they failed?", suddenly Jack spoke up, looking serious and in deep thought. "And... Sandy ended up witnessing the whole thing. The killer probably... had to silence him."

"So you're saying Mr. Sandy was killed by **\*\*chance\*\***?!", said Rapunzel with a gasp.

"Man, talk about being in a bad place at a bad time...", mumbled Flynn.

"But it makes sense. I think that's... what happened.", said Fishlegs. "I'm 90% sure."

So Sandy was killed on a whim, because he saw the murderer getting ready to commit a crime? That's... seriously unfair. But as Fishlegs said, it makes sense. But now the question is... who was the killer's original target?

"So if Sandy wasn't the **\*\*intended victim\*\***, who was it?", asked North, looking suddenly authoritative. "Please, if any of you were threatened last night, step forward! Your testimony may prove to be vital to the case!"

To my surprise, no one spoke up. But why? I'm... sure we're in the right track. But then... why isn't anyone speaking up?! This could be our chance to figure out who the culprit is and yet no one's speaking! Is... someone trying to cover for the murderer?

Monobear suddenly yawns, interrupting the continued silence. "What? No further arguments? If you guys are done debating, we can always proceed to Voting Time.", said the Headmaster as he scratched his rear lazily.

This is bad...! If we don't continue debating, the trial will end... and the truth will elude us! We need to come up with a new topic, and fast! But what can we discuss...?! Odin, if you're real, then please, give a signal, anything to continue this trial!

"Hey, I was wondering about something..."

...Odin, I didn't want the signal to be Tuffnut!

"So like," continued the blonde, with an even more confused look in his face than usual, "What's the murder weapon?"

I had to suppress a groan. Seriously? Was he even paying attention to the trial?!

"Ugh, Tuffnut, are ya daft?!", asked Merida clearly exasperated, "We already established that Sandy was **\*\*hung\*\*** with the flagpole's string!"

To my surprise, Tuff actually looked offended. "Nuh uh, you guys are dumb. That thing isn't the murder weapon at all, it's **\*\*something else\*\***"

What? Why is he so sure about his claim? Did Tuff actually... figure

something out?

"What are you rambling about, Mr. Thorston?.", said Elsa, rubbing her forehead as if to assuage a headache, "The Monobear file clearly reads that the victim died by **\*\*strangulation\*\***. How does that not match the murder weapon we all agreed on?"

"Wow, and we thought she was smart.", said Ruff suddenly, her eyes twinkling with... understanding? Did she also figure out the same thing as Tuff?

"Dumber than the brick wall we dynamited yesterday", said Tuff, nodding at his sister's words.

"Would you guys get to the point already?!", shouted Astrid, suddenly looking out of herself. Huh...?

"Ugh. You guys... you keep saying that Sandy **\*\*died by hanging\*\***, but the Monobear File says **\*\*he died by strangulation\*\***.", said Tuffnut with a scowl. "That's a big difference there."

I had to mentally slap myself for not noticing that. Of course! We've been wrong on the murder weapon all the time! And to think that we wouldn't have noticed if Tuff hadn't spoken up!

...Guess Odin's signal was good after all.

"Is... uh, there any difference?", asked Jack, unsure, "I mean, both entail tying something on the neck to kill, right?"

"Not quite, Jackson.", said Peter as he explained, "Though similar in execution, these two methods of killing cause death in different ways. Strangulation causes death by tying up something on a person's neck, sure, but hanging doesn't do this. Death by hanging is actually attributed to the weight of the person's body pulling on the noose. Gravity does all the work. The 'wounds' they leave are also quite different. Strangulation leaves bruises, while hanging leaves broken trachea and-"

"OK I get it! Enough!", said Jack, looking a bit green.

"Were there any of those wounds on the body?", asked Tooth.

I nodded. "Yeah... I... found both bruises and broken bones on his body." The body WAS hanged after all. "It's a good thing we have the Monobear file or else we wouldn't have known what the true cause of death was."

"More of the killer's traps, perhaps?", suggested Elsa.

"As if the wounds in the body weren't distracting enough...", mumbled Flynn.

"So... like Mr. Tuffnut said... what was the murder weapon that took Mr. Sandy's life?", asked Rapunzel.

This is important. All along we were operating under a false assumption. But now that assumption has been revealed for the fake it is and now, we're presented with this question: What's the **\*\*true murder weapon\*\***?

"Hey, Hic."

Jack's voice catches my attention. I look at the whitette, who gestures with a jerk of chin towards Toothless, who's been paying attention closely to our discussion. The Night Fury looks antsy... pacing in his booth. As if... he were trying to \*\*tell me something\*\*...

Hey! That's it!

I turn to Jack and nod. The fact that the Ultimate Mystery is smirking confidently tells me he has the same idea. I return his smirk with one of my own, and then I take a deep breath. Alright! Let's do this.

"During our investigation,", I began, catching everyone's attention at once, "we wondered something... \*\*what caused Sandy's wounds\*\*?"

"A certain Night Fury assisted us in answering that question", continued Jack, "And thanks to his efforts, we found the weapon that inflicted the wounds on our friend."

"A \*\*spear\*\*", I said.

"But not just any spear!" said Monobear suddenly from his throne, holding the silver weapon on his left paw with ease. How on Earth did he get that from the supermarket to here? "It's the Legendary Gugnir! As seen on TV and it can be yours for the modest price of 9999999999-ow! I bit my tongue..."

"A-anyway... this Gugnir was the thing that wounded our friend.", I continued, ignoring Monobear's antics.

"But are you saying that's the murder weapon?", asked Anna. With a smile, I nodded. Yes, I'm sure I'm right.

"No, that can't be it", said North, shaking his head, "We just established that Sandy died from strangulation."

"Yeah, whoever heard of strangling someone with a spear?", said Aster, an eyebrow arched at me.

"Oh, but that's were you're wrong, Bunny!", interjected Jack, looking at me with those bright blue eyes of his, brimming with confidence. "Hic is correct. Someone strangled Sandy with this Gugnir."

"Allow me to point out," I said as soon as I saw Elsa open her mouth, ready to object, "The \*\*bottom of Gugnir.\*\* Do you see it? \*\*The long chord\*\* attached to the base?"

"That... our friends,", continues Jack, "is the true murder weapon."

"The killer strangled our friend with Gugnir's chord and then proceeded to wound Sandy and hang the body to confuse us!", I pick up where Jack left.

"That's the truth behind Gugnir", finishes Jack, the confident smile

never fading from his face.

We... did it again. I seriously shouldn't feel so happy at how in synch we are. It just feeds my stupid delusions and my crush on this dork. And yet... we bounce off each other so well. I feel like we can... solve any mystery thrown at us.

"Seriously? You guys did it AGAIN?", said Monobear as he looked down at us, "Geez, trigger the M-Rated scene on you guys' character route and be done with it already!"

W-what's his deal?! Why does he keep making those comments?!

"So that's the true murder weapon then?", asks Tooth.

"That's a mighty fine weapon, it is...", says Aster as he studies Gugnir with admiration.

"What's the chord for?", asks Rapunzel, eyeing the thing with fear.

"Oh, I've read about this!", said Fishlegs excitedly, "Believe it or not, these weapons are actually thrown at enemies! And the chord? It's to retrieve the spear without having to walk to the enemy! Like a harpoon!"

"That's right!", said Monobear cheerfully, "Fishy got it! Due to the weapon's dimensions and the type, however, Gugnir can't be wielded by a Lv. 1 Squire! No, only the **\*\*strongest\*\*** and most experienced **\*\*warriors\*\*** can even dare to touch it!"

I get it. You don't have to ramble... That weapon can't be used by any normal person. Only true warriors or whatever can use it. No need to make a big deal. And besides...

I believe that, surprisingly. I've used wooden spears before and I'm bad with those. I doubt I would be able to even lift Gugnir. So now the question is... who can?

There's certainly some people here who can use this weapon, but the million dollar question is: who used it?

I have a hunch... but no... I don't want to consider that possibility.

Because... there's no way! There's no way they're the killer! The thought... simply repulses me! So I must make sure... yes, I must explore every possibility before I jump to any conclusions... I just hope my hunch isn't right.

So... if we want to find out the truth, we need all the information we can gather. Which means...

"So we've uncovered the murder weapon...", says Peter as he looks at the spear with a strange shine in his eyes, "But, now what?"

Merida speaks, "We know what REALLY killed Sandy but we don't know WHO did it still..."

We need to take this discussion in a different direction. One that we

haven't touched.

I turn to face Snotlout. There's no way around this. If we want to find out the truth, he will need to talk. Maybe his testimony will lead us to the truth...

"Snotlout... we need you to tell us what happened to you last night.", I say slowly, trying to sound authoritative, "We need to know why you showed up like that and we need to know what were you doing."

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter looks scared as he realizes the spotlight is on him again. With wide-eyes and trembling lips, he half-shouts: "W-why do I have to do that?! Are you fucking suspecting me, f-fishbone?!"

I shake my head. "No, I know that you didn't do it. But if we want to find out who truly did it, we need to know everything about the crime. Even YOUR side of the story.", I pause and I look directly at Snotlout's eyes. "Please, if not for our sake, then at least for yours?"

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter looks deeply troubled as he fidgets in place, clearly afflicted with whatever thoughts that cross his mind, sweat visible on his forehead. After minutes of grueling silence, Snotlout nods with a tiny movement, one that I would've missed if I weren't staring at him intently.

"Alright fishbone... I'll talk.", Snotlout says curtly, looking at the floor.

In my mind, I do a tiny fist pump. We're finally getting somewhere!

"Snotty's gonna talk?", says Monobear suddenly, "Geez, I really pity you guys... but since I'm such a nice guy... How about a small break before you guys get forced to hear him out? Y'know... clear your minds a bit, relax, collect your thoughts... You're near the end, so it wouldn't do if you guys collapsed from exhaustion you know?"

What is he... talking about?

"So yeah! Take a small breather, you guys! We're near the grand finale! I can't wait for the thrilling conclusion of this Class Trial... right after the break!"

- \*\*MONOBEAR THEATER \*\*-\*\*

"Hey, so! Have you heard? I recently launched my very own line of snacks! They're emblazoned with my cute face and everything! As a mascot, I'm legally obliged to sell products with my face and fully endorse the spirit of capitalism!"

"But y'know... they haven't actually been selling that great... is my time as a mascot character over? Am I past my prime?"

"Huh? You think products would sell better if I changed my slogan? But what's better than 'Guaranteed to not kill you 1 out 10 times'?! Are you saying that my slogan is too extreme?!"

"Well, I refuse to change it. I'll stick with it until it starts selling. After all, that's the spirit of capitalism!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Aaand we're back! Aah... don't you guys feel refreshed after that break? I know I do!"<p>

Who... is Monobear talking to?!

"Anyways", says Monobear, not stopping to explain, "Get on with it, you bastards. Time to hear Snotty babble our lives away! Puhuhuh!"

"Please, Snotlout, ignore that fiendish creature and do go on", says North as he rubs his forehead. The Ultimate Heavy Lifter nods and after taking a deep breath, begins talking.

"I... after what happened at the Quiz thing... I went back to my cottage. I... was thinking about stuff."

"How unlikely! Nyohohoho!", interrupted Monobear, mockingly.

"Shut up!", shouted Snotlout at the bear, looking flushed. "A-anyway! I was there in my room, mulling things over, when a buzz in my pocket caught my attention."

This... is also catching my attention. Is that buzz...?

"Turns out my ElectroID was doing the noise. I checked it out and to my surprise, I got a message from... \*\*someone\*\*." said Snotlout, hesitating a bit during the last part.

"What did the message say?", asked Rapunzel.

"Err... I don't remember how it went.", answered Snotlout, his brow furrowed in thought, "But... the gist of it was all like 'meet me at the Meeting Spot. i need to tell you something important.'"

Someone groaned. I looked around for who had interrupted and I saw Aster face palm.

"And let me guess,", said the Ultimate Survivalist, "you went to meet this fella, didn't you?"

"Yeah", said Snotlout without realizing how stupid his actions were, "why wouldn't I?"

"Uh... Snotlout... the killer basically was luring you!" I shouted at the brown-haired boy, who paled a bit as he realized what we were saying.

"Shut the hell up! There's... there's no way \*\*they\*\* would that!", said Snotlout, still refusing to say any names. He's... covering for the killer? But why?

"M-moving on!", said the Ultimate Heavy Lifter hastily, "I went to the Meeting Spot as soon as I got the message... I think it was like \*\*midnight\*\*? I don't remember exactly... but it \*\*wasn't raining\*\* when I arrived."



"Wait, **\*\*midnight\*\***?", I interrupted, confused, "But I thought it rained earlier than that... I mean, I heard the rain but I didn't when it started... **\*\*I thought it started before 10 PM because I never heard the Night Time announcement...\*\***"

"Now that you mention it", said Tooth, "neither did I."

"I may or may not have fallen asleep before I made the announcement.", said Monobear, smiling cheekily, "I'm not a machine, y'know? I need my beauty rest or I'll ruin my charismatic mascot image!"

OK, so there was no Monobear announcement that night. Crud... that means I lost track of time thinking about and drawing Jack... this is embarrassing.

"Well... after I arrived there," said Snotlout as he continued his tale, "I waited for about 20 minutes. **\*\*No one\*\*** showed up, though. So I thought that... they... wouldn't be coming, so I just left."

Well, that kinda explains why Snotlout didn't leave footprints.

"As I was making my way to my cottage, it started to rain.", said the Ultimate Heavy Lifter with a scrunched up face, clearly displeased with the memory, "so I ran to my cottage to cover myself. But... I **\*\*couldn't\*\*** enter it."

"Why?", asked Anna.

"Because... **\*\*I lost my ElectroID\*\***." said Snotlout embarrassed.

Oh yeah... we can only access our cottage with our ElectroIDs.

"So yeah, I was left out in the rain all night long. And I couldn't **\*\*sleep because of those fucking rules\*\*** either... so I just wandered over to the restaurant and stayed there. And that's all I did yesterday.", said Snotlout, finishing his testimony.

So that's why he looked wet, muddy, and tired. Man, Monobear's rule really screwed him over.

But thanks to this... I now have **\*\*a way\*\*** to unmask the killer.

"Ugh, this was a waste of time.", groaned Ruffnut.

"Yeah, we only like, heard how Snotlout got duped, dumped and damp. No clues for the killer's identity at all.", said Tuff.

"So, is there really no way to find out who did it?", asked Tooth, worried.

"No... there's... a way.", I said. I'm sure now. Snotlout **\*\*knows the truth\*\***. And yet... he keeps covering it up. I don't know why he's doing it... but his lies will be exposed. And I know how to do so, thanks to a detail in his story.

"What do you mean, Hic?", asked Jack, looking lost. Huh... guess it

IS up to me.

I turned to face Snotlout, and steeled myself to confront him. Here goes...

"Snotlout... you **\*\*know who the killer is\*\***... don't you?", I said, and at that accusation, the guy paled.

"I-I don't know what you're talking about...", says the Ultimate Heavy Lifter as he averts his eyes from my face.

"Look, Snotlout," I said as I leaned on my booth, tense, "I know you know who the killer is. Whoever **\*\*summoned\*\*** you with that **\*\*message\*\*** to the Meeting Spot is the killer. And the **\*\*name of the sender\*\*** is always on **\*\*all the messages sent by ElectroID\*\***, so even if you try to cover it up, we can find out who is it by **\*\*simply looking at that\*\*** **\*\*message\*\***."

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter tensed up with nervousness, realizing that I was right. "T-too bad I lost it...", he said with a hollow laugh.

"Where did you lose it?", asked Peter, his eyes scanning the hulking boy.

"If I knew that, it wouldn't be lost, right?", said Snotlout with a huff, "All I know is... that I still had it **\*\*before I left the Meeting Spot\*\***... because I kept checking the hour."

So... Snotlout probably dropped it during one of those times he took it out to check the hour. Which means **\*\*his ElectroID was at the crime scene...\*\*** and yet... neither Jack or I **\*\*found a trace of it...\*\***

"Did any of you guys found it?", asked Fishlegs.

"The only one I found was Sandy's." said Flynn. Everybody else also denied to have seen it.

But... that has to be a lie. If Snotlout **\*\*dropped his ElectroID at the crime scene and no one picked it up, we would have seen it.\*\*** And yet, no one saw it? That's... highly unlikely.

So, where is it? Where is the ElectroID?

...! Wait...

"Isn't it odd?", I began, "I mean... if Snotlout dropped his ElectroID somewhere, wouldn't we have found it? And yet it's nowhere to be found..."

"Maybe it got broken and swept away?", said Merida

"Impossible!", interrupted Monobear, "My ElectroIDs are state-of-the-art! They can withstand pressure of a 100 tons and they're water, fire, and explosion proof! I know how rowdy teens can get, so I made them extra-durable!"

"Man... we have to test those claims out!", said Tuff as he exchanged an evil smile with his twin.

"So, anyway,", I continued, "if it's not broken, and it's nowhere in the camp... the only reasonable thing left is this: someone DID pick up the ElectroID AND still has it."

"But Mr. Hiccup", said Rapunzel, "we all just admitted we didn't pick it up."

"Then one of us lied.", I answered back.

"But who would lie at a crucial moment like this?", asked North, looking outraged.

"Someone... who\*\* is inconvenienced by the existence of that ElectroID and its contents.\*\*..", I said slowly, collecting my thoughts and trying to make coherent sentences, "Someone who also picked it up to hide the truth..."

"The killer...", said Jack breathlessly, his eyes wide. I nod at the whitette. He's right on the money.

"Who is it?! Who's the killer!?", asks Merida fiercely, her eyes boring into mine.

This is it. After this, there's no turning back.

After this... I will find out if my hunch.. was correct.

"We can find out easily who that person is... right now.", I say as I gulp with anticipation. "We just need to \*\*send a message to Snotlout's ElectroID and hear for that buzzing sound.\*\*"

"And whoever has it is the killer.", interrupts Elsa, a small grin on her face. "That is a very fascinating theory, Mr. Haddock. Shall we put it to the test?", and with a calm movement, the Ultimate Figure Skater brings out her own ElectroID.

I nod at her and she proceed to type away a message.

I close my eyes to focus on the sound only, waiting in silence for it.

Seconds feels like hours as Elsa writes the message, the tension in the room only matched by the silence. But it's a different kind of silence. It's charged with anticipation.

One could literally cut the tension with a knife.

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The buzz rings clearly in the silence of the room.

I slowly turn my head to the direction of the sound and I hesitantly open my eyes to see the killer.

...And I curse all the Gods I know.

Because... \*\*because my hunch is right. It was right.\*\*

Because... right now I'm looking at Astrid Hofferson, holding the buzzing ElectroID on her hand, and not looking at us, her face partially hidden by her bang of blonde hair.

My mouth is dry as I speak, not wanting to... refusing... to believe this.

"Astrid... you're the killer."

I wait for her to deny it, to get mad. I wait for the punch in my arm she always throws when she's messing around! I wait for her to do anything!

Anything but just standing there, not refuting the accusation.

But the girl doesn't do anything, at all.

She just stands there, looking at the floor as she holds her left arm with her right hand, not speaking.

"W-what in the world are you sayin', Hiccup?!", shouts Merida, looking aghast, "T-there's no way Astrid did it! H-how can you say that?!"

"B-but she has Snotlout's ElectroID...", I offer, taken aback by the red-head's outburst.

"And it makes sense,", says Peter suddenly, "She is the Ultimate Warrior. Wielding Gugnir should be child's play for her."

"That's not enough to say she's the killer!", shouts Merida, looking angry now, "Even North and Snotlout can lift that thing!", she then turns to me, glaring holes into my face, "A-and what if Elsa made a mistake and sent Astrid a message by accident instead of sendin' it to Snotlout?!"

"There's... an easy way to see to whom the ElectroID belongs to.", says Jack, looking shaken by the revelation. His eyes move from Merida to Astrid, and I see his features harden. "Astrid. Show us the ElectroID.", he demands.

One moment, I'm seeing the device on Astrid's hand, and in another I see the device disappear in a black and white blur. I blink and I see Monobear standing on in front of my booth, smiling widely while offering me the ElectroID. I instinctively take a step back, but I take the device from the bear regardless. The Headmaster jumps off from my booth towards his throne and lands with ease on it, looking smug and excited. Even now... he shows off... as if this were a simple game.

I hesitate a bit before turning on the device on my hand. It flashes briefly for a second before it shows Snotlout's face and name. Without a doubt, this is Snotlout's ElectroID. And also...

I fiddle with it for a second and I find the IM section. To my relief, the message Snotlout got from the killer is still there. And to my despair, the sender of the message is actually... Astrid.

I show the ElectroID and the IM to everyone. I can see how slowly,

but surely, they start to believe my conclusion as they see what I show them. All but Merida, who is still shaking her head side-to-side, vehemently denying what I'm saying.

"You're wrong! T-that's... not proof that she was the killer... b-because..." says the Ultimate Archer, stammering and struggling to find out a way to bail out Astrid, her eyes darting here and there as she grabs her hair. "B-because...! Because you can't prove she was at the crime scene!" she finally says, a bit excited.

"But Ms. Merida...", says Rapunzel, looking worried.

"No! I won't... I won't accept that my friend... I won't accept that Astrid is the killer!", Merida shouts, close to tears, "I won't let you guys vote! Because I... I know she's innocent!"

I close my eyes, unable to keep looking at her acting like this. I... know how she feels. I truly do. I also want to believe Astrid didn't do it, because she's my friend! But if I don't do this... we'll all die. And that's why... I have to put an end to this.

"Well?", asks Peter, "You heard the girl. If we want to end this satisfactorily... we need to prove without a shadow of a doubt that Astrid **\*\*was at the crime scene\*\***."

"But how can we do that?", asks Anna.

"Haven't **\*\*we discussed everything there is to discuss\*\***?", asks Fishlegs.

"Well, not really...", says Jack as he bites his thumb, not looking at Merida nor Astrid, "There's still that **\*\*mysterious footprint\*\*** at the crime scene. I think... we can agree that it belongs to the killer, right?"

That's true. We still don't know who's footprint is it. But...

"But, like, didn't we already compare that footprint with everyone's?", says Tuffnut with a shrug.

"Yeah, none of them matched with it.", comments Ruff.

"We don't even need to look at **\*\*Astrid's boots\*\*** to see that it doesn't match the mysterious footprint", adds Flynn. "The boot is **\*\*far too big\*\***."

"So does that mean Ms. Astrid is innocent?", says Rapunzel, looking at all of us for an answer.

"We can't just discard all the evidence Mr. Haddock has graciously provided, though." says Elsa, to my surprise. She's... taking my side for once?

"But you heard the redhead!", says Snotlout, glaring at me, "If we can't prove Astrid was at the crime scene, we won't vote! Not even if the fishbone says so!". Great. And I thought we were getting alone a little. Guess I'm not saving this guy any more. And on top of that, he keeps trying to cover for her!

"It seems we are at standstill unless we can verify the footprint's

owner...", says North, his beefy arms crossed over as he thinks about the situation.

But... is there a way to prove that the footprint belongs to Astrid? If my deductions are correct... she's the killer, even if I don't want to believe it. So that footprint belongs to her. And yet, it doesn't match her footwear at all.

Think, Haddock! Think! There... must be something! Something I'm forgetting! Something vital!

C'mon, brain! You're not Ultimate-quality but you're my best quality! Give me something!

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A vision... a memory starts forming in my mind. The supermarket slowly forms in my mind. And then. A conversation. It's the day of the party...

\* \* \*

><p><em>"So, what about you, Astrid? Are you done preparing for the party?", I asked, trying to move on.<em>

\_"Oh yeah. Got that done already. I'm actually looking for shoes.", she said as she tapped her boots with her right hand. "Wearing these every day is kinda tiring so I'm getting something more appropriate for the party.\_

\* \* \*

><p>â€|<p>

That's it. I got it. With this... I can prove to who the footprint belongs to... and end this once and for all.

"I... know, how we can find out who the owner of the mystery footprint is." I say, and at this, Merida glares at me, her scowl filled with anger. And it hurts, it hurts me more than anything else. Because I'm sure of it... she hates me now. But I... must do this.

"This... is something only I and Astrid know.", I begin slowly, taking deep breaths as I speak, "On the day of the party... as I went to the supermarket to get ready, I found someone else there.", And as I say this I gaze at the Ultimate Warrior. "Someone who was planning on buying shoes... shoes that they wore at the party... and that they wore when they killed Sandy... "

"And you're sayin' that the one who got new kicks was Astrid?", asks Aster.

I nod. "Yeah. And I'm sure the footprint that was left at the crime scene... matches her new shoes. That's why we couldn't figure out who left it. Because the shoe that left it wasn't here at all..."

Merida tries to say something but before she can, our Headmaster interrupts.

"And this is the part of the story where the hero arrives at the last minute and produces the decisive piece of evidence!", and as he says this, he throws a shoe caked in mud to the floor near Tooth. "A little snooping around Huffy's cottage yielded this! I hope you're beary grateful... Ahahaha!"

I guess this means he can enter pretty much anywhere he wants.

Tooth gingerly picks it up and hoists it for all of us to see. With a grim expression on her face, she gives it to me and I nod. It only takes a few seconds to compare the shoe with the mysterious footprint and it **\*\*matches.\*\*** This... pretty much cements it.

Astrid... is the killer. There's... no way around it.

I share the revelation with everyone and that does it. Even Merida... loses her will to fight back. I can see it in her eyes, brimming with tears. Even though she doesn't want to admit it, in the face of all the proof against Astrid... she can't say anything.

I turn to the after mentioned blonde, who has kept quiet through everything, still holding the same pose. I gulp loudly before speaking, sweat sliding from my forehead.

"So... how about it...? Am I right, Astrid?"

She slightly flinches and for the first time, she looks at me, her blue eyes dull and unfocused. She smiles and laughs, a hollow noise, devoid of any actual happiness. "Heh... well done, Berkian Warrior."

Nothing more is said. A silence unlike anything before fills the courtroom, full with a sense of finality.

...

Monobear breaks that silence.

"Hmm? Are you done? Have you reached your conclusion? No more objections?". No one says anything. "Well then! It's Voting Time!"

A noise in my booth makes me look down, and in front of me appears a screen with our names on it.

"Please cast your vote by touching the name of the killer on the screen! Oh, and before you think about it... let me remind you that you guys HAVE to vote. Not voting is punishment-worthy! So please make sure to select something, OK?", explains the Headmaster, relishing on the subject.

"Now then... what will it be? Will you guys pick the true culprit? Or will you guys make the dreadfully wrong choice? I can't wait! I can't waaait! Now... let's give it our all, because it's Voting Time!"

I close my eyes, a feeling of regret in my heart, and slowly, I make my choice.

As soon as we all make our selection, a giant slot machine appears behind Monobear. Each of the reels spins impossibly fast for a few seconds before slowing down and stopping on Astrid's mugshot. The

slot machine starts to flash and a fanfare plays loudly. Confetti starts to rain down on the courtroom and cheers can be heard all around us, even though the room is devoid of any audience.

...Is this... Monobear's idea of celebrating? But this... is no reason to celebrate! We... just sent our friend to her death!

"You guys were right on the money!", says Monobear, laughing wildly from his throne as the slot machine descends into the floor, "Astrid Hofferson is the Blackened that took the life of dear young Sandy!"

Suddenly, Monobear's red eye lights up, and he shows us his black side once more as he speaks, "I guess I should tell you that the voting for her wasn't unanimous. MerMer... you should be more careful! If the voting wasn't so one sided, you could have killed everyone because of your wrong vote! Nyahaha!"

The redhead in question looks beyond herself, looking at Astrid with disbelief. The blonde in question isn't looking at us at all.

"W-why...", asks Merida in an uncharacteristic low voice, "WHY?! WHY ASTRID?! Why... did you do it?!", she yells now, the Ultimate Warrior flinching at every word as if she were hit. "I... I trusted you! I believed in you!", continues Merida, her tears finally starting to flow. "So... Why..?"

Astrid grimaces, but to my surprise, she actually looks at Merida. And she... starts to speak.

"I did it... because I was afraid."

"...When I heard Snotlout said that he was willing to sacrifice Hiccup, I truly got scared. I know its silly for a warrior like me, the Ultimate Warrior at that, to get scared by this... But I really was afraid to lose any of you, any of my friends."

Astrid suddenly pauses, and her dull eyes start to shine with a fierce determination.

"So that's why... I decided that I had to nip the problem at the bud, so to speak."

As she said that, I could see Snotlout looking heartbroken, finally believing my claims.

"But..." continued Astrid, and as she continued her confession, her eyes turned dull again, "Everything went wrong. I prepared beforehand and got the spear from the supermarket and then I sent the message to Snotlout to lure him to the Meeting Spot. And then I waited at the crime scene, hidden in a bush with Gugnir in hand. It was supposed to be a simple kill. No one had to know, but me. Only I had to bear the burden..."

"However... I hesitated. I thought I was ready to take someone's life to protect my friends, but even though I saw Snotlout there, waiting for me to show up... I couldn't do it. I panicked when I saw him starting to leave, and I threw Gugnir at him, but I was too late. He didn't even notice my attack; he had left. I left my hiding spot to



retrieve the spear, and then I saw an ElectroID on the floor as I made my way there."

"And then... he appeared."

I gripped the edge of my booth. I didn't like where this was heading.

"I panicked. Sandy had arrived and he had seen me throw the spear, I thought. He had seen Snotlout leave, surely... it's what I thought... he would connect the dots quite easily. I started to freak out."

"I had done the act before I knew what happened. In a blur, I crossed the distance between and I... I did it. I moved almost robot-like, on pure instinct. He... didn't even fight back." And as she said that, I could see the regret etched on her face.

"I... panicked even more once I realized what I had done. This... wasn't supposed to happen. I had done something that I deeply regretted. And just like a little kid that made a mess, I tried to hide it."

"So that is why you did all of the tricks and crime scene manipulation?", asks Peter with his eyes closed, analyzing everything Astrid is saying. Her answer is a simple nod.

"But I... never intended for you guys to die. Believe me...", says Astrid, almost pleading, "if I had known the full extent... the full rules of the Class Trip of Mutual Killing... I wouldn't have done any of this! I did all of this... to protect you!" And as she says this, she looks at me specifically.

I have to look away. This... is too much! This... is incredibly unfair! Why?! Why did this have to happen...? This is too cruel!

"Puhuhuhu... but, is that really the **\*\*truth\*\***", interrupts Monobear, looking incredibly smug.

Jack, who was listening to Astrid's confession with a clenched jaw, looks at the Headmaster with a glare. "What the hell do you want now?"

"I'm just saying...", says Monobear with a malicious grin, "Hoffy needs to stop the selfless act! Because I know! I do, yes! I know Hoffy was tempted by my offer!"

...What?

"Time for a tiny history lesson!", begins Monobear with a mocking, all-knowing-like voice, "Did you know Hoffy is the sole heir of the warrior Hofferson tribe? She's also the only daughter of the chief! So naturally, she's fated to become the leader! And it's a very important position!"

"But, oh no! Hoffy's father suddenly gets sick! His condition gets worse and worse with every passing day, and yes... things aren't looking good for Hoffy! But then! Guess what? Hoffy gets an invitation from Hope's Peak Academy! Gasp!" says the Headmaster, greatly exaggerating his actions for theatrical effect.

"Despite her protests, HOFFY's father is no fool. He knows that if HOFFY goes to Hope's Peak Academy, she'll become not only a great chief, she'll bring great glory to the tribe! So he tells her to go, and after insisting and insisting, HOFFY finally agrees! And thus, despite her father's assurance that he will be OK, our dear HOFFY leaves for Hope's Peak Academy with worry in her heart! A worry that only grew as she became a participant in the Camp Trip of Mutual Killing! Puhuhuhu!"

"And I mean... how couldn't she?", he says, his snickering as he spoke growing louder and louder. "Especially when she learned that she had in fact had gone to Hope's Peak for more than a few days! Indeed, it had been more than a few years since she had left the tribe and she didn't have any idea of what became of her father... or rather... she couldn't remember at all! Nyahahaha!"

"N-no...", and for the first time in all my time with her, I saw Astrid's face fill slowly with fear, "Y-you're... wrong! That's not why I did... t-that wasn't..."

"Oh please!" Interrupted Monobear, his eye glinting brightly with delight as he torments the blonde, "You keep saying 'I did it for my friends!' but your self-grandiose façade won't fool me! No one that claims to be selfless... could have done that to her friends! Strangling and wounding someone like that... are the actions of someone who's willing to do anything... to fulfill their selfish wishes."

I want to shut up the bear. I want to defend Astrid's actions. I want to say he's wrong.

But I... I too have started to doubt her. And that... makes me sick.

No one rises to her defense. Not even Snotlout. Not even Merida.

And Astrid looks all alone. Miserable. And full of despair.

"But enough about the history lesson!", says Monobear, dropping the theatrics, "It's time to fulfill my OTHER teacher duties! That's right! It's Punishment Time!"

Punishment... Execution... Death.

I look at Astrid, but to my surprise, she doesn't look afraid. Not anymore. It was as if Monobear's decree had given her a sense of resolve.

"W-wait... wait, you useless doll...!", it's Merida who looks scared instead.

"I won't wait! I've been looking forward to this and I won't let you guys ruin my fun!", says Monobear, looking gleeful.

"No... please! Stop!", begs the redhead, but Monobear continues unabated.

"Now then, I prepared a very special Punishment for Astrid Hofferson, the Ultimate Warrior who lost her composure as soon as she lost

control of the situation!"

"I'm beggin' ya! Don't!", Merida's pleas rise in desperation, but Monobear is only fueled more by her screams.

"Let's give it everything we got! Iiiiiit's Punishment Tiiiime!" says the Headmaster with a high, excitement-filled voice.

"Everyone...", says Astrid, her calm demeanor at odds with the situation, "I won't ask you to forgive me." Jack scoffs as she says that, "But please... at least promise me this... don't repeat the mistakes I did... don't allow Mutual Killing to happen ever again..."

And with those last words, and with Merida's pleas unheard, Monobear summons a weird device with a screen and a big red button on top of it, and as the machine rises in front of him, he brings out a tiny hammer and brings it down on the red button, pressing it. The screen on the device comes alive and the following is displayed on the screen.

**\*\*GAME OVER\*\***

**\*\*ASTRID HOFFERSON HAS BEEN FOUND GUILTY. STARTING PUNISHMENT.\*\***

A cheesy, pixelated animation of Monobear dragging Astrid away is shown as well. But that... doesn't begin to describe what really is happening.

Suddenly, the ceiling of the courtroom opens, and from the gaping darkness descends a metallic claw and with a swift movement, the contraption grabs Astrid by the waist and drags her away roughly. Away from us.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Punishment: Astrid's Hofferson A-Maze-ing Escape!  
<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>An empty arena can be seen. Astrid finds herself right in the middle of it, her stance tense. She looks around for anything, anybody, but the arena is empty. Suddenly, from the audience's seat, Monobear appears, grinning widely with a button on his hand. He slowly lifts his paw before suddenly slamming the button and after doing that, from the ground of the arena around Astrid, wooden walls start rising noisily, forming a maze around the blonde who looks scared.<p>

With another press of the button, Monobear opens a door at the far end of the arena, and from it... comes out something I recognize too well.

Blue scales, a pair of powerful legs armed with sharp talons, a pair of wings and a bird like stance. A Deathly Nadder comes out of the door, and with a roar it storms towards the maze... towards Astrid's position.

The blonde reacts as soon as she hears the roar, and she sprints,

trying to find an exit out of the maze. However, the dragon is fast. Way too fast. It gains on her and even though Astrid is fast on her feet, she gets a burn from the Nadder's fire blast. Still, she manages to lose the dragon after a quick turn, and after wandering about for a few seconds, she finds it.

The exit.

However, as she makes a run for it, the exit suddenly disappears. A wall shifts, closing it.

Monobear's ugly laugh can be heard from the audience's seat, his paw on the button.

Astrid doesn't have a second to rest, though. The Nadder finds her again, and she has to run for it again.

After more evasive maneuvers and more wounds from the beast, she finds the exit again. And like before, with a press of a button, Monobear moves the exit away from her.

The process repeats itself again and again, the Headmaster never allowing the Ultimate Warrior to get close to the exit.

And then, by mere chance, Astrid ends running past the exit after the sixth change. She realizes this and tries to return to it. But Monobear doesn't let her. With another button press, a wall rises in front of Astrid, who falls to her knees, exhausted and hurt.

More walls start to rise around her, trapping her in a small room.

Only a few moments later, the Nadder reaches Astrid, and with a swift jump, it climbs the walls that surround her. The dragon looks down at her for only a second before jumping into Astrid's prison, its roars barely silencing the screams of pain as the Nadder does short work of the blonde.

\* \* \*

><p>All of this... all of this... is shown to us from a screen that appeared in the courtroom as soon as Astrid was dragged away.<p>

There are no words... for how sick and horrified I feel. Those screams... that scene... will always haunt me. How Monobear toyed mercilessly with her... dashing her hopes of escape at every turn. How terrified and beaten she looked... how broken...

I can't even bring myself to care about the fact that Monobear used a dragon on her punishment. I can't even dwell on the fact that he knows about our village's secret.

I feel... numb and empty.

"Extreeeeeme! That sure got my blood pumping!", says Monobear as he reappears in the courtroom, looking beyond himself with happiness. "Man, that felt good! But you know what's better than that! You! You guys look absolutely miserable and so full of despair...! I'm so... excited!"

Sobs and grim faces abound in the room. Everyone... is grieving and terrified... Even Jack... who was angry at Astrid for killing our friend... is obviously bothered by this, his face green and his eyes moist.

"Maaan! I can't wait for the next one!", says the Headmaster with a cheerful tone.

"How? How can you do this to us?!", ask North, angry. And yet, his eyes are red from the tears.

"Why... why are you making us do this?", ask Anna, her sobs barely disguised.

"Huh? I'm not making you guys do anything.", says Monobear with a confused tone, his head tilted to the side, "It's you bastards' fault. You can't let go of the outside world... that's why this happened, y'know? If you don't want this to ever happen again, then forget your ties with the outside and stay here forever! If you can! Ahahahaha!"

"Stop... please, just stop... I don't want to fucking do this anymore...", cries Snotlout, not bothering to hide his tears.

"I won't stop.", says Monobear with a serious tone, his back towards us, "Not until I prove my point to everyone. Not until I prove that Hope is infinitely inferior to Despair. And if I have to make you all despair to death... then so be it! Nyahahaha! That's my only goal here!"

He's... beyond comprehension. He's an absolute madman. A madman who relishes on this, on our suffering. And we're his prisoners.

"Now then! This Class Trial is over! You're dismissed! Let's meet again here someday! Puhuhuhu!", and with that, the Headmaster disappeared, the doors to the elevator opening once more.

\* \* \*

><p>The elevator ride back home was heavy with sadness. No one... spoke. No one said a word. The only noises heard were those of the one's still coming to terms with the death of two of our friends. Merida ran away from us as soon as the elevator's doors opened.<p>

Everyone left without saying a word.

Toothless and I made our way to the Rec Area. As I walked towards my cottage, I chanced a glance at Sandy's cottage. The muddy footprints that had alerted us to the crime were gone. As if nothing had happened.

He's gone. Astrid is gone. And they won't come back. Never again will I... hang out with them, laugh with them...

Something inside of me broke. The reality of the situation finally catching up with me. Toothless instantly curled around me as soon as the first sob broke out. I hugged him tightly, thankful for the comfort as the tears continued to spill, my heart, my very being,

hurt by the loss.

Toothless suddenly shifting made me look up. My bud looked at something and with a soft grunt, he lifted up the wing with which he was covering me.

Jack was standing there. And... he looked as bad as I thought I looked.

He approached me tentatively and curled up next to me and Toothless. It didn't take long for the whitette to cry. He was hurting, too. He too, had lost a close friend. And I understood.

I didn't object when he, in the middle of our crying, suddenly hugged me. Because he needed it. And I needed it too. It's silly... but holding my friend like this... I almost feel like I won't lose him. That he will be OK.

So we remain like this, for who knows how long, crying our pain away under a comforting dragon before returning to our cottages, not wanting to break the Headmaster's rules. Because... we've had enough loss for a while.

And losing someone like him... is something that would definitely kill me.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>[null] POV<span>\*\*

Monitors flash brightly here and there with images of the Camp site, thanks to the cameras scattered around, capturing whatever events that happen in the place. Save for the lights of the monitors that line up all the walls, the room is dark.

But Monobear doesn't mind. His red eye is equipped with a high-performance lens and thus the darkness doesn't bother him. Hell, he doesn't even have to worry about deteriorating eyesight, because he's a robot!

But then again, Monobear doesn't worry about much. Not even about the other person that is currently with him in this room. Because he's in control of everything in this camp, even of this person.

"So? What do you have for me?", the bear asks the person in front of him. "Is the despair setting in? Well?"

The person nods. The bear hoots with delight.

"Excellent! Everything is according to plan! In fact, it's going better than ever! I love it when my plans work better than I had expected! It's like getting a Christmas present from moi!"

The person is confused. What does he mean, he wonders.

"I'm talking about Sandy biting the dust! I mean, I had planned for YOU to off him but that stupid girl got him first without having to force you to act! Man, talk about a satisfying conclusion!"

Oh? Why is he so happy about Sandy dying? Or rather... why did he

want to force the person in front of him to kill Sandy? The person is now curious on top of being confused.

"Hahah! As if I would reveal THAT to you! I mean, I know we're kinda working together, but I don't trust you! That's what you usually do with traitors, after all!"

Oh. That is a shame, thinks the person in front of Monobear.

"Now, leave! I have no use for you right now, but that's OK... continue observing until I come up for a nice scheme for you, my little traitor!"

Monobear looks at a specific monitor: The one that is recording the Meeting Spot, now clean of corpses and any hints of murder ever happening.

The mysterious machine in the Meeting Spot is ticking the time away. It is now past midnight. A new day has begun... a new day for a new despair-inducing plan.

Yes... everything was going according to Monobear's plan.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>DAYS LEFT: 24 DAYS<strong>

\*\*STUDENTS STILL ALIVE: 14\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 1 - A Youthful Summer of Despair - END<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>So... that's the first arc done! How did you like it? Writing a compelling mystery is hard and I do hope to improve as I keep writing this story, but what do you guys think? Please sound away your opinions with a nice, shiny review... s'il vous plaÃt!<strong>

\*\*Thanks for all the support, previous reviews, and favorites and follows! You guys make this BEARable, haha! See ya later!\*\*

## 15. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days A

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days \*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And we're back with...! Another transition chapter... A surprisingly long transition chapter. I surprisingly didn't dread writing this... I had a lot of fun too! You'll know why soon...<strong>

\*\*Also, an announcement! Free Time Event voting is once again open! Please cast your votes in the reviews (ONLY if you leave a real review), via PM orrr by participating in the poll on my profile!  
\*\*

**\*\*And now! Please enjoy!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>I'm... I'm a failure.<p>

I couldn't do anything... I couldn't save her!

No matter how much I ran, how much I yelled for help... how much I begged all the Gods I knew... all was for naught. I was too late... and now...

She's gone.

And she won't return.

...What... what am I even good for...? What use is my "talent"? It's... because of this "talent" I have... it's my fault! This happened because of me!

I... killed her. I killed her!

All my fault... all my fault...

An icy sensation starts to surround me, and I start to panic.

No... not again! Anything but this feeling! Anything but this cold darkness! Even death! But anything... but this!

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I wake with a long, terrified scream. I can feel sweat running across my forehead... and tears... as I try to calm myself down, my eyes trying to adjust to the darkness of my cottage.

It was a dream... only a stupid nightmare. Nothing more. I tell that to myself, trying to convince no one else but me...

But this is the second night in a row that I've had that nightmare. What does it mean...? Who is 'she'? Who couldn't I save? Did I... did I really kill someone before I lost y memory? My talent did that to someone?

Maybe... maybe I'm better off not knowing who I really am...

I shake my head. Don't be stupid, Jack. You're jumping to conclusions, again, Jack. You're probably overthinking it, Jack. It was a simple nightmare, Jack.

A nightmare... that I've been having since... the end of the Class Trial.

After that accursed event happened, I returned to my cottage as fast as I could. But even though I tried to force myself to sleep... to try to force the grief, the memories of the trial... I couldn't do it. That's when I had the first nightmare. It was so vivid... it made me run out of my cottage, full of fear and guilt.



If... If I hadn't found Hiccup curled up in front of his cottage with Toothless, crying too... I don't know what I would have done. Without meaning to, he had saved me. Without judging me, without asking what was wrong with me, he cried along with me. Without protesting, despite how much he hated personal contact, he allowed me to hug him.

Hiccup... had been there for me that night. Intentionally or not, he stayed. And for that, I was truly grateful. Knowing that he was there for me... made the following days more bearable.

Ever since the Class Trial ended, the mood has been somber all around us. No cheery greetings are exchanged, only mumbled, short 'hellos' are said. No one looks at each other in the eye far more longer than necessary. Breakfast reunions are quiet endeavors, the two empty chairs that will no longer be filled by our departed friends sticking out like sore thumbs.

Merida doesn't stay to eat at all. She's been avoiding all of us. I guess... she hasn't forgiven us for what we did to Astrid... and she may never will.

Hiccup, however, is taking this worse than any of us. Mainly because of Snotlout.

Before, the Ultimate Heavy Lifter simply insulted or shoved him rarely. Since the Class Trial, however, he's been spiting the little Viking at every opportunity. Whenever he passes by Hiccup, he shoves him roughly, or elbows him hard. His insults have also risen in spite, more personal and venomous than ever.

By the time Hic gets a huge gash on his left arm after a rather nasty fall courtesy of Snotlout, I'm all but ready to throttle the guy. But Hic stops me and Toothless. And that's honestly all that's keeping us in check.

He's... not his usual self, either. He keeps spacing out. His responses to my questions are short and dry. He hasn't made a quip or let out a sarcastic reply at all. The bags under his eyes are becoming more prominent and he hasn't smiled. Not even a fake smile.

And yet, he and Toothless keep me company. I don't want to admit it, but I need it. Even though they're quiet moments, staying with him takes my mind off of things.

My mind...

My mind is a confused mess, and I'm not sure how to feel about these memories of mine. Especially the memories concerning Hic. I still don't know if they're real... and I still don't know if the feelings I sense whenever I remember them are true. I don't want to weird Hiccup out by telling him this, either. I can imagine it now:

"Hey, Hic! I remembered we used to be an item and we kissed and hugged and stuff. What do you say."

...He would surely peg me for a lunatic. He would probably start avoiding me. And I couldn't deal with that. I don't want to lose my

friend over something stupid like this. It's... better if I keep quiet about this, for now...

And so... those two days have passed. Somber days and nightmare-ridden nights. Nothing much is done, if anything. We just live on, the feeling of grief still hanging above us.

And this reoccurring nightmare... for it to appear... does it mean something?

...What would Sandy say?

I immediately stop that train of thought. No, I don't need to... relive that again. The nightmare itself was enough.

With some difficulty, I bury those thoughts and the nightmare and I try to go back to sleep. I sincerely hope for a good night's rest... but then again, daring to hope in this place is useless.

That... is something I learned the hard way.

\* \* \*

><p>It's the morning of the third day since the Class Trial, and though the day is sunny, my disposition is anything but. I didn't get any rest last night, as expected.<p>

Going to the restaurant for breakfast meetings have become routine, even though no 'meetings' are actually being held. Picking up Hic for breakfast has also become routine for me, and he's always waiting for me without fail. I guess... we just do it because we need something static in our lives... something established, something that gives a sense of normalcy.

Of course, Merida doesn't share that feeling. The only routine of hers lately is that of avoiding us. She doesn't come to pick up Hic with me.

Today isn't any different. As soon as I exit the cottage, I wave at the Night Fury on top of Hic's roof. Toothless' gummy grin is one of the few things that still make me smile, and the Night Fury eagerly jumps from the roof to greet me, the dragon's tongue giving me my daily dose of dragon spit.

Hic arrives a few minutes later. He... isn't looking so well today either. He barely registers I'm there, and it takes Toothless' growl greeting to make him look at us.

"Hey.", he says, his voice lacking any emotion and intonation.

"Good morning.", I answer, but it's like I'm talking to a wall. Like he's not even here.

I'm... I'm really worried about him.

"Hic... are you OK?", I ask, tentatively. It seems he heard me this time, because he looks extremely confused, with his eyebrows arched and eyes wide open.

"Huh...? Oh, um... I'm alright, yeah...", he says, before his face

returns to that vacant, spacey expression he had before. Without saying anything, he starts to walk to the restaurant, not even looking if we're following him.

As we watch him go, Toothless lets out a small, sad whine. I place my hand on his head and I pet him slowly. I understand how he feels... Hiccup really isn't OK.

But how can I help him? Can I even do that...? What should I do?

As cheesy as it sounds, I want to make Hiccup smile or laugh... or to at least get a reaction out of him. But how should I proceed?

Wondering about that, I caught up to Hic with Toothless not far behind.

\* \* \*

><p>Breakfast was already starting in the worst possible manner.<p>

As soon as we opened the door, a familiar bundle of red head collided with me. Somehow managing to keep my balance, I apologized out of instinct to Merida, who looked like a deer hit by a car's headlights.

Before I or Hic could say anything to her, though, the redhead pushed us roughly to the side and ran past us, her hands full of bags of take-out food.

She's... really avoiding us.

I chanced a look at Hic's face and I could see it in the way he was grimacing; Merida's actions were affecting him more than he let on.

Things didn't turn out any better once we entered the restaurant.

As Hic and I made our way to the table with trays of food in hand, the auburn-haired kid suddenly yelped as he was pushed from the back, landing roughly all over his breakfast platter and staining his clothes with syrup and eggs.

I tried my best to not punch in Snotlout's face as he laughed and called Hiccup an 'useless fucker' and instead went to help him up. Even though his bangs of hair obscured most of his eyes, I could tell he was being bothered a lot by this, he looked like he was about to break.

"You should get changed, ankle-biter... before it gets stained permanently."

I turned as soon as I heard Bunny's voice. He looked concerned... I was surprised he was even talking to us. These past days, hardly any of the others had talked to us. But this guy... looked genuinely worried about Hiccup.

The Ultimate Lucky Student looked as surprised as I was, but he nodded just the same. Taking a look at his green, short-sleeved

t-shirt he had gotten from the supermarket, Hic let out a big sigh and turned to leave.

"Do you want me to come along?", I asked, before I could think about why I wanted to go with him.

"No... it's OK. I can do it myself...", he says without turning around. Yeah, he doesn't need my help changing... why did I even ask? "You... stay here. Get something to eat... you don't look so well."

You don't look any better, Hic. But I nod at him and he takes that as his signal to leave.

"Kid really takes better of others than 'imself, huh...", says Bunny as we see him leave. I turn to face him with an arched eyebrow. So he noticed...

"That's Hic for ya." I answer. He really is like that.

I make my way to the table and I can see Snotlout eyeing the door as he chews on his pancakes, sitting by himself.

"He doesn't look so well... must be takin' it hard.", comments Bunny as he walks next to me and accompanies me to the table. Why is he... following me?

"Yeah." I answer awkwardly, not used to talking to other people with full sentences after 2 days of short answers.

"You're takin' it pretty hard as well, aren't ya?", he asks as we sit down to eat, his face serious.

"What makes you say that?", I answer with a question of my own. Why is he suddenly talking to me?

"Well... for starters,", says Bunny as he lifts a hand and starts listing things off, "You look like you haven't sleep for a fortnight, you haven't made a joke at anyone's expense and you haven't been setting booby traps for me at all."

I'm taken by surprise, but I can't help but to feel a little angry. "Making jokes isn't all I'm good for..."

"I could swear otherwise," he says and I'm about to protest but he interrupts me, "my point is; I'm worried about you and the little guy."

"... You are?", I say surprised. I could've sworn he hated me.

"Sure, you're a pain in the ass, and the kid has a mouth that makes me wanna sock 'im, but...", he says with as he scratches the top of his head, his fingers digging deep into his silver hair, "That doesn't mean I ain't worried about you two. Your endless energy and that kid's wittiness and optimism despite all... I know you two are dealin' with this... but you shouldn't lose sight of yourself, ya understand?"

I don't know what to say. I never expected this side of Aster... I

always took him for a grumpy jerk but... he's surprisingly mature.

Bunny looks flustered as I look at him with renewed admiration. "All I'm sayin i-is... it's alright to be sad, mate... but you shouldn't let the grief crush ya, you understand? Don't let it stop ya from livin' your life, ya get me? Don't forget the pain, but live on with it... is all am sayin'."

I laugh for the first time in days as I see Aster struggle with his explanation, apparently thinking that I didn't understand him the first time around. The Ultimate Survivalist scowls at my reaction.

"And here I thought I was doin' you a favor...", he grumbles.

"No... I...", I say between laughs. This guy... is really something else. "Don't get me wrong. You... you really helped." He truly did. "Thanks, Aster. You're really a softie on the inside, aren't you?"

The Ultimate Survivalist blushes before giving me a noogie, "Don't try your luck with me, Frostbite."

With a better mood than before, I finish my breakfast in the company of Bunny, mostly making small talk. It's... a far cry from how everyone used to talk before, but this... is nice.

By the time I finish my breakfast, however, my mind wanders to Hiccup. He hasn't returned yet... should I pick him up? He needs to eat too...

Sudden movement catches my eye and I look around until I see Snotlout leaving the restaurant in a hurry.

A sense of dread fills me. Reacting to that emotion, I hastily say good bye to Aster as I stand up from my table, much to his confusion.

I don't... want to jump to conclusions but this fear...

I'm practically running as I exit the restaurant. On the distance I can see Snot leaving the Rec Area and making his way to the Lodge Area. My heart sinks.

I chase the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's trail as fast as I can, hoping that I'm not too late.

\* \* \*

><p>I take a detour through the forest behind the Lodge Area and enter the clearing near Hic's cottage. To my relief, I arrive before Snot. A few minutes later he arrives, with an angry scowl on his face as he walks towards the little Viking's cottage. I move and stop in front of Hic's door, blocking Snot's way. He's startled at my sudden appearance, but the scowl returns with renewed intensity. "Get the fuck out of my way, Overland.", he barks as an order, but I just shake my head slowly.<p>

"Why do you keep harming Hic?", I state, more than ask.

"I'm just giving the little shithead what he deserves", he says, a sneer appearing on his round face. "Now move!"

He tries to push me aside but I stand my ground. I push him back, much to his surprise. Almost as if he wasn't expecting me to do something like this. But there's no way I'm letting him hurt Hic anymore.

"I said move, damn it!", he shouts, clearly annoyed at my actions. "Or I'll punch your face in, you white-haired freak!". I only glare at him, determined to not let him pass.

"No."

He's still angry about the Class Trial. I know he is. He was acting strange during it and Astrid's punishment really seemed to unsettle him. But...

"Stop blaming Hic for what happened at the Class Trial.", I say to Snot and he visibly flinches. "It wasn't his fault. You also voted for her, so don't go pinning the blame on hi-"

Pain erupts from the right side of my head. My eyesight turns red and I can feel myself falling, my body meeting the ground a few moments later. I can taste blood on my mouth, the iron-like taste strong. I feel extremely disoriented, but I somehow manage to look up from the ground towards Snotlout, who has his right fist raised, looking red with anger.

I see... so he punched me. So this is how it feels to be decked... Man, it sucks.

But... I won't let this stop me. He won't get to Hic, at all.

Feeling groggy and dizzy, and goddamn the right side of my face hurts, I slowly pick myself up from the ground. My knees wobble a little as I stand up and face Snotlout, who looks surprised. I can't help but to feel a bit satisfied at that expression. Heh, guess he wasn't expecting me to get up at all. I really shouldn't feel confident about the fact that I can take a punch from the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, especially right after receiving said punch, but a smirk slowly forms in my face.

Instinctively, I feebly put up my fists in front of me. I still haven't recovered from that strike and I haven't been in a real fight at all in my life, or at least I don't recall ever being in one, but if it means protecting my friend... well, there's always a first time for everything.

I feel strangely confident as I square off against the much bigger teen in front of me. "Is that all you got? Merida punches harder than that.", I taunt, knowing it's a bad idea but I don't care. Snotlout, however, does seem to care, and with a growl he raises another fist, getting ready to throw another punch. I brace myself.

The punch never comes because a loud roar interrupts us. Snotlout effectively pales as he looks at something behind me and I turn around to see Toothless and Hic, both looking angry. Snot takes a

step back as the Night Fury advances on him, growling .

"Get out of here, Snotlout. Now.", says Hiccup, in a commanding tone. The Ultimate Heavy Lifter looks at the Viking with anger, but Toothless' roar sends him packing. Before he leaves, though, he shouts at Hic: "You can't even fight your own battles, you goddamn pussy!". Toothless shoots a warning shot and that finally makes him leave.

I turn to face Hic, and I can see him glaring in the general direction of Snotlout's retreat with narrowed eyes before letting out a sigh and then turning to face me with a worried expression. Before I can talk, he hurriedly returns to his cottage while saying: "Wait here."

A minute barely passes before the auburn-haired kid returns with a first-aid kit on hand, his expression still worried but now showing a bit of determination. He sits down next to and directs me to do the same, to which I comply. I have to smile as I see Hic looking around the kit and he catches my smile as he turns to face me with a cotton swab and an alcohol bottle in hand.

"What are you so happy about?", he asks with narrowed eyes.

"It's just nice to see you act so worried about me." I say, truthfully. Hiccup showing this much emotion is great, compared to the past two days.

He looks offended as he applies alcohol to the cotton swab and I wince as he presses the thing to my cheek harder than needed. "Of course I do worry about you. You always get your dumb butt in dangerous situations."

The way he's cleaning my cheek harsher than needed and that comment... I can't help but to feel a bit angry. "Gee, I save your ass and this is what I get?", Hiccup then starts cleaning my nose and I sputter a little, "t-the world's most crabbiest nurse?"

Hiccup stops cleaning and as he disposes of the cotton swab, I can see its stained with blood. Man, did Snot get my nose as well?

"...I didn't need you to save my butt...", he mumbles without looking at me.

My anger grows. "Hic, he was going to kick your ass."

"I'm tougher than I look. I... could've taken it."

I harshly grab Hic by the shoulders, forcing him to see me. I've had enough of this martyr bullshit. "Don't you think I know that?!", he flinches a bit, "I... I know you're tough, Hic. I'm not saying you aren't. You're probably one of the toughest people I've ever met!"

"But... that doesn't mean you have to take it all alone."

Hiccup looks at me with wide eyes, surprised by my sudden outburst. I take this as my chance to continue.

"You aren't alone, Hic.", I stare directly at his eyes. "You have me

and Toothless. So don't try to shoulder everything by yourself, OK? I... we're here for you.", Aster's words come to mind. "Stop blaming yourself for things you weren't responsible for." At this, Hic grimaces and looks ready to protest but I don't let him speak. "I'm not telling you to forget about Astrid and Sandy's death. I'm telling you to move on while carrying that grief. And I'm telling you that you don't have to carry that burden by yourself. We'll... do it together, OK?"

Hiccup lowers his gaze, not meeting my eyes.

"I-it's what those two would've wanted... for us to keep up living." I finish, lamely.

A brief silence falls between us, and I let go of Hic, not knowing what else to say.

"You're... right. Astrid would... surely punch me in the arm and Sandy would give me the lecture of my life for being so mopey...", says the auburn-haired Viking suddenly. He lifts his gaze, his eyes watery with tears, but a sincere smile is on his face. One of those smiles where his crooked teeth can be seen.

"Thanks, Jack." he says, sounding more alive than ever. The hug he gives me comes out of nowhere, but I return it.

"Hey... that's why we're...", a flash of memory; Hic and I holding hands on the rooftop of Hope's Peak as we look over the city's landscape, "boyfr-! boy, we're friends, right?!"

Talk about an almost Freudian slip! Jack, you need to keep yourself in check!

Hiccup chuckles next to my ear and he breaks the hug, much to my... disappointment? Is that what I'm feeling? "Only Odin knows what I did to deserve a friend like you. Must be bad karma."

There it is... that sarcastic quip. How I missed it.

"Are you sure? I think I'm pretty good company. I mean, I'm nice to look at, right?", I say, hoping to see a return of our comeback routine.

Hic rolls his eyes as he closes the first-aid kit and stands up. "Sure, I... enjoy greatly the company of a... bruised, frosty clown. Nothing better than that, no sir!"

We both end laughing a little, more because of the moment than our comments. More than anything, I'm happy Hic is smiling once again. Things... aren't OK. We're still both sad... but we're trying to move on. We need to take that first step.

"C'mon, dork. We need to get you some food, so put that back in and let's get going." I say to Hic as I give him a small nudge.

"Yeah... we also need to... plan our next move," says Hic as he starts to move towards the cottage, Toothless following him looking happier than before, "We need to decide what we're going to do... all about this. So we need to talk with everyone."



I nod. It's true. If we do want to move on, we all need to do so. We have to choose a course of action.

Me and Toothless waited for Hic to return the first-aid kit and we walked towards the restaurant together, daring to feel a little hopeful about our situation.

\* \* \*

><p>To our surprise, everyone was still on the restaurant, even Snotlout. Merida was nowhere to be seen, though.<p>

However, someone else was at restaurant. Someone I wasn't happy to see at all.

Monobear.

"Welcome! Please, do come in and take a seat! I have something important to say!"

I almost wanted to turn back and leave, but I knew defying Monobear without thinking would only makes things worse for everyone, so I grudgingly went to take a seat next to Aster, who lifted an eyebrow as he saw my face. Hiccup sat hesitantly next to me, not taking his eyes off Monobear.

"Y'know...", began the Headmaster, "I've been watching you guys these past days and I can't help but notice that you look sad..."

An ugly snort from Flynn sounded across the room, "Hah! You think?"

Monobear continued unperturbed, "And you know what? I'm bored. Nothing is happening and just watching you guys mill around like lost elderly folk in their last days isn't my idea of fun so... I've decided to reward you!"

"Reward us?", asked Anna, looking at the Headmaster with worry.

"Yes! You guys performed admirably on the Class Trial... so as a reward, I'm expanding your horizons, so to speak!", said the bear with a grandiose sweep of his arms.

We looked at each other confused.

"What do you mean by that?", asked North with a puzzled expression.

"You may recall," began Monobear, "there was a giant gate blocking the way on the Mountain Pass, yes?"

True. I remember that. Hic and I talked with Bunny there.

"Well, I'm sure you're wondering what's behind that gate... Don't wonder anymore! I removed that gate, so you can explore that place as much as you want! Go on! Go wild! Stretch your wings!", said Monobear as he raised a paw to the sky, "Who knows... you might even find something out about you guys' past there too... Ahahahaha! Ha!", and with that cryptic remark, Monobear disappeared.

This didn't feel right.

Was this Monobear's trap?

Suddenly, Hic spoke up. "S-so... what should we do, guys?", he asked, his nasally voice clear and loud in the quiet room.

"Hmm, this is quite the conundrum...", said Pitch as he crossed his arms.

"Monobear is obviously plotting something. I'm 80% sure of that.", said Fishlegs as he closed his eyes to think.

"But... he's also known to say the truth so...", muttered Tooth.

"Ya really think there might be somethin' about our past in that place?", asked Bunny.

I'm sure of it, Monobear is plotting something. I doubt he would give us a clue about our past for free, considering he made us kill each other for it. But does that mean there's actually something there about ourselves, like Tooth suggested?

"Well... it's better than staying here doing nothing." I said with a shrug, "We should check it out, I think."

"Whoa, dude, what happened to your face?", asked Tuff as he took a look at me. Suddenly, everyone's eyes were on me, and I couldn't help but feel a little self-conscious. I could see Snotlout squirm with discomfort in his seat.

My eyes darted to Hic, who looked uncomfortable as well. Anna caught me doing that and her mouth opened with a gasp. "Did you and Hiccup... fight?"

Hic and I both looked at each other before laughing, much to the shock and confusion of others. Man, she got the wrong idea totally, but it works. Even if I want to get Snotlout in trouble, with this, I don't have to explain anything.

"Something like that." I answered, with a smile. "Y'know how it is... sometimes we have to knock some sense into each other."

"He knocked something more than sense into your face, Frostbite.", said Bunny as he looked at my bruise.

"Didn't know Hiccup had that on him, that's for sure." said Flynn looking amused.

"But it makes sense! I did read that in a book...", said Rapunzel as she looked at us with wonder.

"Just what kind of books are you reading...?", said the Ultimate Thief as he looked at Rapunzel with narrowed eyes.

"A-Anyhow...!", said Hic, looking flustered, "Are we going there to investigate?"

Silence once again filled the room. "I don't know, Mr. Haddock... it

might be a trap. Another ploy to instill Mutual Killing.", said Elsa with a tinge of worry trickling through her calm demeanor.

"But...", began North. "It is just like Jack has said. We cannot afford to stay here any longer, under the bear's control. We need to find way out."

"I don't think Monobear is going to leave a way out for us there...", said Fishlegs, looking unsure.

"But we have to try, mate. Who knows? Maybe we'll learn something that will help us make an escape plan.", said Bunny, acting more gung ho about this than I expected.

"Well, we have nothing better to do so, like, count us in.", said Ruff, her twin nodding.

"Geez, if only we could fly over that stupid fence...", said Anna, looking annoyed.

"Please, be reasonable, Anna." chided Elsa. "So, are we all going then?"

Some of the people in our group still looked undecided. And then...

"Gee, ya sure a sorry lot."

I hadn't heard that heavily accented voice in days. Sure enough, as I turned in the general direction of the voice, there was Merida, looking a little disheveled but otherwise fine.

"How long are ya gonna sit on yer asses doin' nothin'?", she said with arms crossed. "Don't ya think we wasted enough time feelin' sorry for ourselves?", her eyes darkened a little. "T-they didn't die for us to just sit here and let our lives go to waste, y'know? We need to get goin' and escape from this place, OK?!"

To day that we were speechless was an understatement. Especially me. I never expected Merida to not only encourage us... but to actually talk to us? I thought she hated us... and yet here we are.

"Merida is absolutely right." says North in answer, standing up to his full height. "Come on everyone. We better start doing something before our legs atrophy! Let us get with the going!"

With an odd amount of energy that no doubt was infused because of Merida's rousing speech, everyone was led by North outside the restaurant, a feeling of feeble excitement surrounding the people who followed him.

Only Hiccup, Merida and I were left at the restaurant, and... well, to say that the silence was awkward was an understatement. The redheaded girl and the auburn-haired kid were avoiding each other's gazes, looking uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry."

Merida broke the silence first, a look of genuine regret on her face. "I've...been actin' like a real butthead these past days, haven't

I?", she said with a nervous smile.

"N-no... I..!", began Hiccup, clearly taken a back by Merida's apology. "It's understandable... I mean! What with what happened and all... so don't apologize! I'm... not mad with you, Merida, honest!"

Merida smiled as she saw the Ultimate Lucky Student stutter with his apology, obviously relieved that he had forgiven her. She then turned to face me, expectant.

I grimaced. "You've... been hurting Hiccup a lot, y'know? By ignoring him. He really felt responsible for this.", I said. That's what really bothered me.

"Jack, please, it's not importan-", Hiccup began but I silenced by lifting my hand.

"I'm just telling her the consequences of her actions, Hic. It IS important.", I kept my gaze on her. "Why... do you want to apologize now?"

She was... blushing? "I... I heard what you said to Hiccup back at the Lodge Area."

Oh.

Now it was my turn to blush.

"And... it made me realize... I was looking at this the wrong way." continued the redhead. "Astrid... wouldn't ever forgive me if she saw me acting like this. Sandy would... probably fill 'is sketchbook with frowny faces...", and she laughed a small laugh as she said this. "So... I decided. I'm not gonna let this stop me."

Her face turned determined.

"I'll... definitely find a way outta here and we'll escape together!"

That's all I needed to hear. I gave her a smirk and gave her a quick hug. I really couldn't stay mad at her. Hiccup gave her a big, sheepish smile, obviously happy that we were talking again.

"Thanks, guys.", she said, looking brighter than ever.

"Alright! That exit ain't gonna find itself!", she suddenly exclaimed. "Leave no stone unturned, OK? Race ya to the place!", and without even waiting for us to agree to her terms, she left the restaurant with a sprint.

I turned to see Hic and with a wave of my arm, I gestured to the exit. "Shall we?"

Hic rolled his eyes, but smiled. "Yeah, yeah. But I'm not gonna race you, OK?"

And with that comment, we left the restaurant together, accompanied by Toothless who was looking excited, no doubt because of the large number of people who left before us and because of our much cheerful

moods.

We don't know what awaits us beyond the Mountain Pass... but we need to keep moving forward. No matter what.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hmm hmm... this was a rather slow chapter, I'm afraid... but I wanted to write some fluff? Next chapter is going to have much more intrigue and mystery and plot stuffings, I promise!<strong>

\*\*All the reviews are appreciated, as always! Especially those of you that always comment, like Kitsu\_Maxwell, BlackNightRaven1 and XaLO and... well, if I keep naming all of you, this will get unbearably long! So once again, thank you from the bottom of my heart!\*\*

## 16. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days B

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days B\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>No Free Time Events in this chapter. Thing was getting way too long. So, next time we'll have 'em. As a consolation prize, I've introduced more plot bunnies. They're rapidly appearing in this story, just like their namesake. You'll end up wondering if you will be able to handle such sheer number of bunny plot points. But do not worry, I have everything under control. So just enjoy and figuratively cuddle with the plot bunnies, if you want.<br>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Hiccup's POV<span>  
><strong>

I was expecting the Mountain Pass to be a harsh climb, what with Monobear's tendency of trying to make our existence miserable, but much like the rest of the Camp, the mountain trail was actually well maintained. It was a simple path that slanted upwards ever so slightly, surrounded by the forest on each side, the greenery contrasting nicely with the gray of the stone path we were traversing on. It was actually quite peaceful, at odds with the true nature of this camp. A few minutes of walking brought us to a cliff wall, tall and foreboding. I craned my neck as much as I could and I swore I could make out the peaks of a mountain over the edge of the cliff wall.

But it looked like the path ended here... But that can't be it. I mean, if it did, then where is everyone?

"Hey, Hic, what's that?"

I looked to my right, where Jack was pointing. Is... that a cable car? It's huge! Toothless had scurried over to investigate it and he was dwarfed by the thing! Of course, the car was styled after Monobear, just like everything in the camp.

I take my time to explain what a cable car is to Jack, seeing how he

probably forgot about the existence of these due to his memory loss. The whitette nods after I finish explaining, genuine wonder on his eyes as he eyes the contraption. The look is replaced by a frown, black eyebrows furrowing with confusion.

"But Hic... this cable car doesn't look like what you described to me."

It was true. Most cable cars travel horizontally, ascending in a slope like fashion. THIS cable car, however, seemed to travel vertically, as if it were an elevator. Which I GUESS makes sense, since apparently this is the only way to climb this cliff wall.

Should we use it, though? I mean, everyone else presumably did so, and if we want to actually get things done, we had to ride it... but I couldn't help but feel a little uneasy about the thing.

Jack didn't share my worry, though. He tugged at my sleeve enthusiastically, pulling me towards the cable car, apparently dying to ride the thing. "C'mon, Hic! Let's go!"

I had to smile at how alive Jack looked when he was experiencing new things. Feeling a little less nervous, I boarded the vehicle, with Toothless walking behind me, looking restless as he sniffed the interior of the car.

Jack and I sat each on one of the many seats available on the humongous cable car, the Ultimate Mystery looking outside the window excitedly, and soon after, the contraption closed its doors automatically and the ride started, slow but steady. Toothless gave a nervous growl as he curled on the floor in front of me, and I patted his head in order to calm him down. I guess he was just nervous about riding in things he couldn't control.

The ride was quiet, the only noises being produced by Jack's constant shuffling as he looked outside and pointed at things in the landscape. I had to admit, for such a dreary place, the view was quite beautiful. Hard to think that murder happens in this place with such beauty... Of course, Monobear Tower can be seen from here, the top of it STILL not visible despite how high we are, but neither Jack or I point that out, ignoring the subject on purpose.

I'm not particularly focusing on the view outside, to be honest... the sightseeing I'm doing is quite different.

I just can't help but keep shooting glances at Jack.

This boy... he has lost everything. He doesn't remember anything. He just lost something he recently only gained. And even still, he looked out for me. He hung around me even in my funk. He got in a fight for me and got hurt in the process. And still, he didn't hold it against me. He didn't abandon me and he even helped me to get my act together.

To say that I was grateful for his friendship and that my crush on him had intensified was an understatement.

Said boy caught me looking, and I looked away, embarrassed. I chance a glance after a few moments pass... and it's light... but... is that

color on his cheeks?

Oh no... did I make things awkward? Crud... way to go, Haddock!

Jack slowly sits back on his seat, looking pensive and unusually silent. I start to worry, countless scenarios of the worst possible outcome swimming in my mind.

"Hic... I... have something to confess...", says the whittette, the frown on his face intensifying ever so slightly. My nervousness, however, intensifies by a hundred.

"I... remembered more things.", says Jack, looking serious.

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. Man, talk about worrying over nothing. But still... this is great news! I'm about to congratulate him when I notice he looks more tired than ever.

"...I take it those memories weren't nice ones?", I ask. It's brief, but I can see his face lit up and his cheeks darken a bit before he shakes his head and laughs. "Yeah, they've been more like nightmares, to be honest. Haven't been able to sleep well these past days."

That makes sense. He does look pretty tired. That bruise doesn't help either. But... I wonder... if they're only terrible dreams... what was up with that reaction?

Jack looks deep in thought, his blue eyes focused on an invisible point, not really looking at anything there. I cough to catch his attention and he actually jumps a little.

"So... do you want to talk about it?", I ask.

Jack closes his eyes while crossing his arms, briefly considering this question before sighing and nodding.

He starts with a dream of him escaping from something unknown, fearfully running through a ruined city towards Hope's Peak Academy. He tells me how the school is apparently destroyed by a giant Monobear. He then tells me about another dream where he feels like he killed someone. That he left someone die.

I can't help but to feel that he's holding back information from me but I don't pressure him, as Jack looks deeply troubled by these 'dreams'.

"And the worst part is...", he says after telling me about them, "I can't even tell if they're memories or what."

"I'm scared, Hic.", he mumbles with a bit of panic on his voice, "I'm scared of who I really am. If those memories are real memories... then... then I'm a truly terrible person."

I... had no idea Jack felt this way. I always assumed he hadn't remembered anything else, but he was suffering in silence.

"Why didn't you tell me...?"

"Honestly? I don't even know, Hic.", he say as he closes his eyes and leans his head back on the seat, "I guess... I just didn't want to

worry you about this? You had a lot on your plate and well...", He pauses with a sigh, "I guess I was also afraid of you walking away from me once you heard who I really was."

Now this won't do. I put a hand on his leg, and the action makes him look at me. "Don't be stupid.", I say with a stern face. "The only Jack I know is the one in front of me. That's who you really are."

He looks at me with surprise etched on his features before breaking into a smile. "Thanks, Hic."

I return the gesture. "Don't mention it. Besides... I think those dreams? Yeah, they're probably nightmares. T-there's no way Hope's Peak Academy got destroyed and that the city did as well. And you killing someone? No way. So... all of the dreams you've had? All of them, fake, I bet."

My words have the opposite effect; instead of reassuring him, he looks even more troubled. Did I say something wrong?

"Uh... Jack? What's the matter? Did I say something...?", I ask, but he shakes his head vigorously. "No... I'm... I'm OK." he says, his voice subdued.

But before I can ask more, because seriously Jack looked conflicted, the cable car comes to a sudden stop, the doors opening slowly.

"Guess our stop is here.", says the whitette and stands up briskly, already walking towards the exit.

Talk about an attitude change. He almost looked... offended? Was I out of line with my comment? I really should apologize, then. Toothless and I hurry to catch up to Jack, but before I can talk to him, the sight outside the cable car takes me by surprise.

Snow.

It's everywhere. On the ground, falling from the sky softly... on the trees. A sign covered in snow greets us, reading 'Monobear's Bone Chilling Resort!'. Trees are huddled together in clusters, arranged in such a way that they form a path further into the area. I bring out my ElectroID in order to get a general idea of the place but it comes up blank. Guess Monobear really wants us to investigate this place by ourselves.

I give Jack a look, but the white-haired teen is too busy looking at the snow. He's actually enthralled by it, his eyes shining with wonder and, as a laugh escapes his lips when he catches a snowflake on his hand, I can't bring myself to bring up the previous subject. I don't want to ruin his fun.

Instead, I decide to keep quiet as the goof starts running around in the clearing we're standing on, kicking up snow here and there, his arms spread around as if he were flying. Toothless soon can't resist and joins Jack, chasing him around much to the boy's delight. A few minutes of this passes, I being too immersed in the fun they're having to object, when suddenly Jack looks at me and gives me an odd



look before shaking his head as if the idea he was having didn't make sense and then he approaches me with a big smile.

"Hic, this place is amazing!", he says as if he were having the time of his life.

I chuckle and I give a noncommittal shrug. "Eh, snow is alright, I guess. Berk has it's share of it for a lot of the year." It was true. Sometimes the exaggeration 'snows 9 times of the month' that passes as a saying in Berk wasn't that far from the truth.

Jack just rolls his eyes before smirking. "Wow, Hic. I didn't know you were this much of a stick-in-the-mud."

I narrow my eyes. "Is that another fishbone joke?"

Jack simply sticks his tongue out. "I'll never tell!"

Seriously, what a 5 year old!

"Gee, your company is always so pleasant.", I say with obvious sarcastic intent. "C'mon, we have to check this place out. I'll show you how to have real fun with the snow after we're done." And with that, I start to walk towards a path north of the clearing, the only one visible through the cluster of trees.

"Hmm... 'fun' and 'Hic'...", says Jack as he walks up to me, a mock thoughtful expression on his face. "Somehow I don't see it."

My only response is an elbow to his gut, to which I get a light shove in retaliation.

Yeah... I'm not going to bring that back up any time soon. I'm... having too much fun with him just like this.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I don't know why, but when Hiccup said that all my dreams were fake... I got very upset. Why would I get upset, though? I didn't understand at first... I mean, I didn't want those dreams to be real memories... so how come I got angry? And why did some of my anger get redirected to Hiccup?

The more I thought about it, though, it dawned on me.

Those memories of Hic and I together.

Yeah, that... had to be it. I... didn't want those to be fake. That had to be it. So... is that my answer? Is that the solution to my problems? The problem of 'How I REALLY feel about those memories slash dreams'?

I really wanted to be with him like that?

Well, even if I wanted to be like him... and those green eyes of his capable of showing such a nice variety of emotions.. and that shy smile that only seems to get complimented by those crooked teeth... and those freckles that make me wonder how many he has and...

and...

And I need to control myself!

Because even if I want to be with him like that... like I said before... he might not feel the same. I don't want to scare him away. And I mean... why would he even feel something like that for me? Sure, I think I have a nice face (Ruffnut stated as much when I met her) but to him I'm just a stranger. We're friends, true, but he doesn't even know me that well! Not even I know myself that well... so he probably... not, he certainly will never feel about me like that.

Besides... he's probably too busy with our current situation to even think about silly stuff like that...

I should focus on the situation as well. I should put this crush on him (because that's what this is, damn it) on the back burner.

Hic and I finally emerge from the forest path we took and to my delight, we come into a place filled with even more snow! This oval-shaped clearing isn't empty, either! 2 Wooden cabins adorned with carvings, paint and... horned helmets?... can be seen. I can't help but to stare at the buildings with interest, their triangle-like roofs oddly charming. They're quite unlike anything I've seen before. Equally interesting is the wooden pole in the middle of the clearing, figures of men holding swords and shields carved on it.

All of my wonder is replaced with anger when I see the person who is leaning on that pole.

Snotlout.

I didn't say anything back at the restaurant because I'm sure Hic wouldn't want the brute to get in trouble, but if he wants to try his luck with him again... he'll have to go through me.

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter spots us and starts to walk over. I can see the apprehension in Hic's face and I instinctively walk in front of him, Toothless joining me, his teeth bared. Snot looks nervous as he eyes us but something's off... he's not putting a tough front...

"Oi... fishb-, err... Haddock.", begins Snotlout, looking unsure, "I... just wanted to say."

A long pause stretches as Hic listens intently to the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's words.

Finally, Snot seems to gather his thoughts enough to speak again, "I just wanted to say... that I forgive you."

"Huh?"

Both Hic and I utter that in confusion, Toothless looking befuddled as well. Snot seems oddly embarrassed despite his choice of words, running a meaty hand through his hair. "I said... I forgive you. For whatever happened at the Class Trial. I'm not angry at you anymore so I... won't bother you about that anymore."

...Is this guy for real? He should be apologizing, not forgiving!

"O-oh... um, sure? Thanks, I guess?"

Aaand of course, Hic forgives him. I can't help but to roll my eyes at the little Viking. The Ultimate Heavy Lifter nods at Hic's response, and he turns to leave, shivering. "G-great that's cleared up, I guess. Catch ya later, Haddock... preferably somewhere warm."

And without even waiting for a response, Snot leaves, walking down a path to the east.

"What kind of crappy apology was that?", I say as soon as he leaves.

Hic shrugs. "Well, for him, it's progress."

"You're too nice, Hic. You should've gotten back at him.", I say as I shove him lightly with my shoulder.

"Eh... it'd rather have things done with. Why hold grudges, anyway?", he says nonchalantly as he walks to the cottage near us, eyeing the camera installed above the door. I guess Monobear is monitoring us as well.

"I still think a small blast of Toothless would've been nice.", I say as I catch up to him, who is pulling at the door with all his might, the handle rattling from the effort.

"Well...", he says as he glares at the door and kicks it in frustration. "We could always use you for target practice.", he says with a smirk as he walks to the next cottage, before he slips on the snow midway there. I catch him and I chuckle at his blush, the tiny Viking readjusting his short sleeved shirt embarrassedly.

"Hey, aren't you cold, Hic?", I ask, suddenly worried. I'm fine because of my hoodie, but Hiccup certainly isn't outfitted with winter clothing. The auburn-haired kid simply shakes his head, the blush on his face not receding. "Nah... I'm used to the cold. Berk's winters are brutal, so this is nothing." We finally reach the other cottage and the door of this one is actually unlocked, Hic hesitating a bit before entering.

"Oh really?". Now I'm curious about Hic's village more.

"Yeah, really.", he says as he takes a look at the room. It's a weird room, alright. There's 14 desks with computers installed on them, each with their own set of headphones. On the back of the room, a giant monitor that occupies the entire wall can be seen. And that's all there is in this room. No windows, no doors besides the one we entered. "But even if the winters got harsh, we can keep ourselves warm with the help of our dragons.", says Hic as he walks to one of the computers and picks up a headphone absentmindedly.

I turn to see Toothless, who is sniffing one of the headphones. "So, Toothless has been with you for a long time?"

The Ultimate Lucky Student blinks, but nods quickly. "A-Ah, yeah..

had him since he was a hatchling, actually." A wistful look appears on his eyes, as if he were recalling something distant. "One day... I found an abandoned egg in the woods. There was no nest in sight, and no parents nearby. It was just there... in the middle of the woods. I had never seen a dragon egg like this before, so I took it home."

A fond smile spreads on Hic's face. "It was also my first time hatching an egg. If I had known they exploded, I would've been more prepared."

"Dragon eggs explode?", I said with disbelief. I can just picture a little... er, littler Hic taking care of an egg that suddenly explodes. I can't help but to laugh, much to the little Viking's chagrin.

"Yeah, they do.", he says as he takes another look at the room before losing interest. "But... it was thanks to that that I met Toothless. His parents never came from him, and he was the only Night Fury in the village, so... I took care of him. We've been friends ever since." Hic walks to said dragon and starts to scratch behind his frill, who purrs with contentment.

"You two did seem pretty close..." I say as I see the scene in front of me fondly.

"Yup... he's my best friend... which is why we have to get out of here.", says Hic, eyeing the tail of the Night Fury with a sad expression.

I walk towards them and put a hand on Hic's shoulder, ignoring the electric-like feeling I get from the contact. "Don't worry. We'll find a way out."

Green eyes meet mine for a second before looking away, a nervous cough escaping Hiccup. "Y-yeah. Let's keep looking.", he says before he starts to walk towards the exit.

Aw, damn, I keep forgetting he hates this kind of contact! Way to go, Jack, you only made things uncomfortable! I need to keep my hands to myself...

With that self-scolding, I catch up to Hic as we walk outside of the cottage and on to the next area, following the path Snot took.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

"Hmm, according to the Map... we just left the Arrival Plaza... and we checked out the A/V Room." I say as I take a look at the ElectroID, the map now showing something, but only the parts we've been to.

Jack nods as he takes a look at his own ElectroID. "Yeah... and now we're in the... uh, 'Final Clearing'?"

I take my eyes off my ID and I scan the area. Compared to all the other places we've been in this camp, this place is much more smaller. There's nothing worthy of note here, save the lone building near the edge of the cliff. However... the building itself is unique.

Unlike the previous cottages, this small building is completely made of metal. Much like the A/V Room, this building doesn't have any visible windows and it's completely square. The only noteworthy feature of the building is a giant door with a green skull painted on it, red swirls on it's cheeks and red eyes looking at us.

Aside from this building, only a monitor and cameras can be seen in the Final Clearing. A path that leads north and a path that continues further east are the only other important things in this place.

Toothless and I exchange a look. I can tell he's thinking the same as me. That building... and this Final Clearing... feel weird. But... there might be something important here... so we need to investigate.

Gathering as much courage as I can, I walk towards the building, Jack and Toothless following suit. However, before I can open the ornery-painted door...

"Beware, you mortal fools! For this is the Final Death Room!"

"Loki's stained undergarments!"

Monobear had decided to appear right in front of me and let's just say that I was... OK, I was scared by his sudden appearance. The bear looked delighted at my reaction.

"Hee hee... Ah... good thing I have a camera installed on my eye... That look in your face was priceless, Hiccy! I'm gonna watch your stupid face whenever I'm bored!", said the Headmaster with a childish grin.

"What the hell do you want?", asked Jack, walking up to the bear with a menacing glare.

"Oh yeah.", said Monobear and he cleared his throat. "Beware, you mortal fools, for this is the Final Death Room!", he repeated with an exaggerated and theatrical tone of voice. "This room is definitely not for the faint of heart! Any of you who enters this room will be tossed into a glorious game of Life and Death! You either come out of it a winner or in a casket! And if you mortals somehow manage to win... then you'll be able to claim your reward! A weapon suited perfectly for Mutual Killing! Sweet, huh?"

Oh... so this room is useless?

"You don't look so excited about this...", says the Headmaster looking crestfallen.

"Well, duh. Why would we want to play a game to get a weapon to kill someone?", said Jack with narrowed eyes.

"We're not falling for your tricks anymore, so yeah... this room is useless to us.", I say with contempt.

"Guh! I go to all the trouble of crafting such an intense room and you guys just step on me and my motivation... children these days are

so ruthless and lacking in calcium... Boohohooohoo...", and with fake tears leaking from his eyes, Monobear disappears after rambling his usual nonsense.

"I guess we're avoiding this place, then?", asks Jack with an eyebrow raised.

"Definitely." I say. This Final Death Room... is nothing but bad news. We'll need to talk with the others about this. But first, we need to check the rest of this place out. Without saying any words, we go and take the path that leads further east.

\* \* \*

><p>The path east of the Final Clearing leads us to a place I wasn't expecting to see in a Camp, much less in a place called 'Monobear's Bone Chilling Resort'.<p>

A giant expanse surrounded by forests, with a hill in the middle, greets us. On top of the hill sits a building. No, rather... a mansion. There's no other way to describe the enormous building, it's style completely out of place with the previous cottages and the Final Death Room. To the tall windows and the white pillars contrasting with the red brick, and to the giant door with moon carvings...

Out of pure instinct, I bring out my ElectroID. Sure enough, the area's name is now displayed. Archive Area, it reads... and this building is called... MiM Library? What an odd name... but hey, my name's Hiccup, so what do I know?

I turn to Jack, who is too enthralled with the building to bring out his ID. I roll my eyes and I bump into him to bring him to his senses, and with his attention fully caught, I motion him to walk with me to the library.

As soon as we're at the door, however, they burst open right on our faces, making me and Jack fall back from the impact. With pain filling every part of my body, I look up to see the culprit and I'm not surprised to see the twins rushing past us. What surprises me is the fact that they're carrying books.

"Man, who knew books could tell us how to destroy things?! Like, who knew reading while we were still alive could be useful?", I hear Ruffnut shout to her twin as they pass by us.

"Yeah, we're gonna make so many explosives and catapults, they won't know what hit 'em! Hel, I don't even know what I'm gonna hit 'em with!", says Tuffnut with a mischievous grin, not even looking at us as they round the corner and leave the area.

Typical Twins behavior. Well, at least my fall wasn't so bad... I fell on something soft, after all... wait...

"Ugh... as if the bruise wasn't bad enough..."

Jack's voice... is coming from below me.

I take a look and sure enough, I'm lying over a sprawled out Jack, who is rubbing his face with a scowl, eyes closed in pain. When he

opens them, though, clear astonishment can be seen on them.

Oh Thor why...

It is in a mess of flailing limbs and hurried apologies that we separate and stand up, the blush in my cheeks fully transforming me in the skinniest tomato alive. Jack's pale skin makes his own blush more pronounced, his eyes darting here and there, not really looking at me, his hand scratching the back of his neck.

"So... yeah u-umm... sorry about that Hic..."

"No, I'm sorry for falling on top of you!"

"O-oh... I don't min- I mean, it's alright! No harm done, really!"

"Oh Gods, I'm so sorry Jack, really!"

I want Nidhog to break through the earth and devour me on the spot. This... is too embarrassing!

"Relax, Hic, I'm fine! Really, compared to the Snotlout thing, this nothing!", he says with a confident smirk, the bruise under his eye were the fist connected looking bigger. I feel guilty but the door hitting us wasn't precisely my fault so I let it rest. And if he says he's fine...

I cough awkwardly into my fist. "S-so... if you're fine... shall we..?", I say as I gesture to the door with my left hand.

Jack smiles and nods. "I told you, I'm fine! Now let's get going, you worrywart!", and with a spring on his step, the whitette enters the library, slowly looking at everything as he passes the left-ajar doors.

Odin's Ghost... I can't help but to dwell on the fact that I was lying on top of him... feeling his chest rise as breathed, the movement of his lean muscles discernible even through the hoodie he always wears...

Toothless' face interrupts my train of thought, a smug look plastered all over him as he looks at me.

"Wh-what's with that face..?!", I say, the heat in my cheeks returning. Just what I needed, my bud teasing me! The Night Fury rolls his green eyes at me as he walks past me, giving me a light whack with his tail. Geez, I really should do something with his attitude... But I guess my bud has a point. I need to decide what I should do with these feelings...

...R-right after we check this place out, of course! I'm not stalling for time, no, no, no. It's JUST... priorities, right! Right!

\* \* \*

><p>Just as the map said, this huge mansion was a library, and it certainly looked the part. While it lacked any bookshelves, it had the next best thing: walls lined with thousands and thousands of books. The four walls of the library served as bookshelves and given

the dimensions of this place, I can only imagine the quantity of books stored in this place. The only other thing in the library aside from the books were four giant tables in the middle of the room, which already had piles of books on them, set aside for later reading.<p>

This library had a home-y feel to it, what with the green rug and the grand chandelier shining brightly over us. It honestly made me want to settle down on one of those tables and grab a book for a nice read. However, one aspect ruined that atmosphere.

Monobear.

Or rather, a statue of him. The bear held a pose of confidence, paws on his hips and head held high. The statue itself was big and noticeable due to its light blue coloring, and it was facing the four tables with a watchful eyes from its stand. Around the statue I could see pieces of rubble surrounding it... and I also could see Jack, who was eyeing the statue with disdain.

Yeah, I understand that feeling. What a bad piece of decoration. But I suppose Monobear just can't help to remind us that this whole camp is under his control. I make my way over to Jack, stepping carefully around the rubble until I'm next to him. From where I'm standing, I see a plaque which I hadn't seen and curiosity gets the better of me. Unsurprisingly, the plaque has been vandalized crudely with a red marker, and it now reads:

\_"Out with the old geezers and in with the new and sexy Monobear! This statue is dedicated to me, myself and I because... I deserve it, yes!"\_

I let out a sigh. Yep... the Headmaster is at it again. But judging by the text in the plaque and the rubble around the stand... I'm guessing there was another statue here before Monobear put up his and destroyed the other one. But was there a reason for that? Or was Monobear simply being a jerk?

"Oh! Mr. Hiccup! Mr. Jackson! Nice to see you!"

We both turned around at the greeting, and we saw Rapunzel, accompanied by Fishlegs who was carrying a dangerously tall pile of books that threatened to tip over, walking towards us. The Ultimate Painter shoved the books she was carrying on to the Ultimate Encyclopedia's pile before greeting us with a smile.

"Hello, Rapunzel."

"Hey, Punzie."

The Ultimate Painter looked at us through narrowed eyes and pursed lips, focusing on Jack's face before opening her eyes wide.

"Mr. Jackson... did you and Mr. Hiccup bond again? Your bruise is bigger..."

Jack smiled bashfully, "Yeah, I guess you could say that..."

"Um... actually," I interjected, "a door did that, not me."



"So I'm guessing the one who gave Jack that bruise was Snotlout, then?", said Fishlegs as he put down the pile of books in a nearby table.

"Heh... was it that obvious?", I answered. Of course Fishlegs would notice.

"Hiccup please. I doubt you would seriously hurt Jack. You two seem too close to actually fight. And the only other person who would go out asking for trouble is Snotlout so I just connected the dots.", said the Ultimate Encyclopedia with a smug look.

"Aw... but I was sure Mr. Hiccup and Mr. Jackson were bonding like in that book I read..", said Rapunzel disappointed.

"Hey, Punzie?", said Jack suddenly, "Why do you keep calling me Mr. Jackson?"

Oh yeah, that's true. She also started to call me Mr. Hiccup all of a sudden. "Yeah, now that you mention it... you never called me Mr. Hiccup before... so why?"

The Ultimate Painter lowered her gaze embarrassed. "Oh? Was I doing something wrong? It's just... I read in a book that you should always greet other people like that in order to make a good impression..."

"You really do believe everything you read, huh?", I say with a smile.

"Well, you can drop it. Jack's just fine. Calling me Jackson makes me feel like a Dad or someone old...", said Jack with a disgruntled expression.

I had to nod. Mr. Hiccup is... too formal and it makes me feel like I'm someone important, which I'm not.

"Sorry...", said Rapunzel with a shy smile, "It's just... I've never interacted with kids my age... or the outside world that much. Everything is new to me!"

That's... odd. I'd expect someone that's called the Ultimate Painter to be famous and world-weary, with lots of friends. And Rapunzel is certainly friendly enough to make them... so...

"Well, don't worry about it.", said Fishlegs with a fond smile. "You can learn about a lot of things here. With the amount of books here, I'm sure we'll find out something about our situation between us three!"

"Wait, three?", asked Jack, curious.

"Oh yeah! Peter is helping us! He's probably somewhere reading...", said Rapunzel excited.

"Yep. So don't worry guys. We have this place covered! We'll share our findings at the restaurant, so you can look forward to something later!", said Fishlegs with a twinkle on his eyes.

Jack shrugged. "Well, I'm not much for reading, anyways." With arms

behind his head, the white-haired teen began to walk backwards, facing me, with a grin on his face."Shall we, Hic?"

Truth be told, I wanted to actually read some of the books... but I guess we don't have time for that. I nod at Jack and follow him, putting my hopes on the three Ultimates on the library.

\* \* \*

><p>Turns out there was nothing past the library. No more path, only a cliff. I don't know how high this resort is, but the fact that I could see clouds below us was not reassuring. So without anywhere else to go, we returned to the Final Clearing and we took the north path this time.<p>

Ever since I saw that wooden pole and the cottages in the Arrival Plaza... I've had this nagging feeling on the back of my head. The style and the carvings... seem familiar. But why?

The answer to that question came to me as soon as arrived at the next area, the Grand Square. It was a circular clearing, devoid of any forests, at the foot of a looming mountain. Cottages sat at the edges of the clearing, surrounding it, all in the same style as the ones seen on the Arrival Plaza. And in the middle of the square there were... Vikings. Statues of Vikings... all too familiar... Waaay too familiar to be a coincidence.

Yes, I was sure now. This whole resort was designed to look like Berk. I could even see a mock up of the Grand Hall carved into the mountain's base.

But... why? Why would Monobear do this? Was he messing with us... with me? But what for?

"Hic, you OK?"

Jack's worried tone of voice snaps me out of my reverie. "Y-yeah... I'm alright. It's just... this place looks a lot like my village..."

The Ultimate Mystery's eyebrows shot up in shock, taking a look at the place with more interest. I share a look with Toothless. Yeah... he recognizes the place too... but without any of the people we know... this place just isn't the same, no matter how well recreated it is.

In any case, we need to search this place. If the Headmaster thinks I'm going to be dissuaded by this trick, then he's got another thing coming. Jack and I exchange a nod before we split in order to investigate all the cottages.

Unfortunately, many of them are locked or entirely empty and devoid of anything, even furniture. It makes me question what was Monobear's reason behind making these...

There is one building, however, that sends me down memory lane.

A perfect replica of the forge I used back in Berk. I exchange a look with Toothless before we walk over to check it out. To my surprise, it isn't exactly empty. Though it lacks any of the tools or materials

I had back in Berk, the forge installed on it is actually real and functioning. And I guess Flynn being here also qualifies as not empty.

"Yo, Hiccup!", greets the Ultimate Thief jovially as he snoops around the place, a glint in his eyes... I'm aware this isn't actually MY forge but the way he's looking around... I feel like he's about to steal from my forge.

"Hey... um, what are you doing, Flynn?", I ask, trying to suppress that nonsensical feeling I was having.

The Ultimate Thief sighs, running a hand through his hair, before answering. "Nothin' much. I'm trying to look for clues but no luck so far. And you? You are the Ultimate Lucky Student, after all."

I shake my head. "Nothing so far... but I think Fishlegs, Rapunzel and Peter might find something..."

"Really? Well... better than nothing I suppose.", says Flynn as he leans on a familiar table with his arms crossed. "I hope they find something... I'm getting tired of being cooped up. I want to stretch my legs and do some sightseeing, man..."

I can't help but to feel uneasy at the way he says that. Apparently my uneasiness shows in my face, because the Ultimate Thief smiles. "Relax, kiddo. I'm a thief, not an assassin. I was just whinning. No need to be so uptight."

"Hahah-h-a... I guess I'm just a little stressed...", I answer. Flynn nods as he stands up straight and begins to walk towards the exit. "I hear ya. I guess I'll take a walk to let off some steam. See ya later, Hiccup. Hopefully with some clues!" and after patting me in the back (far more roughly than necessary, might I add), he leaves.

I... I'm just worrying myself over nothing right? There's no way Flynn would ever... yeah, right! He wouldn't... right?

"Aha! So that's where you were!"

Jack's deep voice startles me, making me jump. I really need to get my nerves in check!

"Whoa, what's this place?", asks the white-haired idiot as he looks around my work station with wonder. I briefly explain to him what a forge is and he snaps his fingers, suddenly recalling one of the things we talked about back when we first met in that room we all awoke in.

"Oh! So this is where you make all your inventions and weapons?"

"All my useless inventions, yeah... but... yeah! This... is the place where I make the magic happen! Or at least, a place that looks like it." I shake my hands half-heartedly in front of me. "Tah daaaaah..."

Jack snickers at my gesture, but resumes his gazing, taking all details of the place in, before suddenly zeroing on me. "Sooo... you

going to show me your trade or what?"

"E-excuse me?"

He rolls his eyes. "I want to see you work, Hic. Care to give a demonstration?"

I... certainly wouldn't mind but... "While I would love to make a fool of myself for your entertainment, I can't make anything without tools or materials."

Jack's expression falls at my comment. "You're doing that again, you know? Stop selling yourself short, Hic. Pun not intended." He looks at me dead serious. "I bet the things you create are amazing! I just want to see you make something, is all. Who knows? Maybe you'll be able to make something that will let us escape!"

I scoff at that. As if that would ever happen. "I... seriously doubt it, Jack. But...", I say, not meeting his gaze, "I guess I could make something for you... after we're done with this investigation... just don't expect something grand, OK? I'm not the Ultimate Craftsman for a reason..."

Despite me saying that, the Ultimate Mystery looks beyond himself, expression all giddy "Well, what are we waiting for?", he says as he grabs my arm and pulls me out of the forge, "Let's get this over with!"

Haha... of all the things that could motivate him... well, I guess that's Jack for you.

\* \* \*

><p>The Grand Square has four exits, each one positioned like the cardinal directions: North East, West, South. We came from the South, the Final Clearing. I'm greatly interested on the Grand Hall look-alike that's situated north, so I propose to Jack that we investigate it first, to which he readily obliges.<p>

As soon as we climb the steps and open the giant wooden doors, I'm treated to blast from the past. Down to every detail, the Grand Hall is exactly the same. Even the ElectroID map labels it as such. However, much like the Berk village imitation outside, this place feels odd without Vikings roughing it up, eating or simply talking. Like an empty husk, is the expression. There are some notable difference, however.

First, is the fact that the doors have a digital lock installed on them, though it remains inactive. Second, there are more cameras and monitors installed on the stone pillars that support the room, along with some machine guns for good measure. Third, all the Viking tapestries and banners that hung back on the walls of the Berk version of the Grand Hall have been replaced with Monobear-themed ones, some of them displaying... questionable poses.

I guess my Viking pride is stronger than I thought... because seeing those banners is making me grit my teeth with anger. And I would've expressed my anger if North's looming figure hadn't been walking straight at me with a stern expression.

I instinctively got out of his way, but it seems North's mind was somewhere else because he didn't notice me as he exited the building.

"North, wait!"

Tooth's voice made me look back into the Grand Hall. Sure enough, the Ultimate Dentist was in the middle of the room, looking flustered. "Ooooh, that man doesn't heed a word I say! I swear, he needs to take things more slowly!", she said to herself as she paced in a circle before she noticed we were there, a pink blush filling her rosy cheeks.

"Oh! I didn't see you there, boys! Here for a little investigation?"

I nodded.

"What's up with Nick, Tooth?", asked Jack as he pointed in the general direction of North's retreat with his thumb. Uneasiness appeared on the Ultimate Dentist's face as she regarded the question, before nodding to herself.

"Well... we were searching the place together. We initially didn't find anything, but I bumped on one of the banners and suddenly, a folder fell out behind it! I was shocked, but you should've seen North's expression when he read it!", she then started to bite her thumb.

"He abruptly decided to hold a meeting on the restaurant after he finished looking at the folder's contents. I'm guessing he's going around informing everyone right now..."

Huh... that's... odd for North. Whatever he read in that folder must be pretty big.

"Any idea of what that folder is all about, Tooth?", asked Jack.

The Ultimate Dentist shook her head. "I didn't get a chance to look at it, but..." she tilted her head to the left, "the folder itself was blue and it had this weird logo on it... I think it said \*\*'Future Foundation'\*\*?"

Huh? "\*\*Future Foundation\*\*? Not \*\*Hope's Peak\*\*?", I asked, to which Tooth nodded.

What's... going on? What is the Future Foundation? Do they have anything to do with this, whatever they are?

"Ugh... this doesn't make any sense.", Jack groaned, "and we didn't even get to check this resort completely!"

"But... I guess we don't have a choice. We need to go to North's meeting. Maybe we'll learn something there...". Or at least, I hope so.

"I'm gonna go ahead, in that case." said Tooth with a slight worried expression. "See you there, boys." And with her labcoat billowing as she walked hurriedly past us, she left.

I didn't have to look at Jack to see that he was confused. And tense. I was too. For some reason, I had this foreboding feeling...

"Well, no use in hesitating", said Jack as let out a big sigh, "Let's go, Hic."

"Yeah... Let's go bud.", and with Toothless' growl of consent, we made our way to the cable car, as I tried to calm myself for the meeting.

\* \* \*

<p><strong><span>Jack's POV<span>\*\*

Hic was tense and silent on our return trip to the Rec Area, but I understood his feelings. It didn't meant I liked seeing him like that, but somehow I figured this wasn't the time for jokes.

By the time we reached the restaurant, the sun had already set and night had come to the camp. We really lost track of time up there.

Thankfully, we weren't the last to arrive, because as we entered the restaurant and sat down at our places, Bunny entered after us, all bundled up with a sweater and a scarf. The Ultimate Survivalist sat next to us and though it was muffled by the scarf, I could hear his grumbling. "Bloody snow... hate that thing more than anythin'..."

I had to chuckle at that. Who'd knew Bunny was such a weakling in the cold? Of course, my laughter came at a price, and I had to hiss as I rubbed the arm Bunny had punched.

"You deserved it.", came the voice of Merida and Hiccup in unison, both of them looking amused by my pain.

"Glad to know you're on my side." I grumbled.

North's voice soon rang over everyone else's, asking us to tell everyone what we discovered. Anna and Elsa spoke up first.

"East of the Grand Square...", began Elsa, "We found an hotel of sorts called 'Virtue's Last Reward'."

"Charming." muttered Peter.

"But! We didn't actually get to check it out!", said Anna, interrupting Elsa, "Because Monobear didn't allow us to get past the lobby!"

"How come?" asked Snotlout.

"Apparently, the place needed to be cleaned first, so Monobear only allowed us to wander around the lobby, but we were prohibited access to the guest rooms." said Elsa with an annoyed expression.

"Yeah... Monobear himself was cleaning! He was wearing a maid costume! He looked super cute!" said Anna more excited than normal.

"I... sincerely doubt that." said Hic, and the Ultimate Hiker visibly

deflated.

"Aside from that, we didn't find anything useful, and I don't think we'll ever use those guest rooms anyway." said Elsa, finishing her report before sending a glare to the little Viking which he didn't see. What's her deal?

"Next is us!" shouted Merida as she stood up excitedly, "Aster and I found somethin' awesome! Y'know how that whole place is called 'Monobear's Bone Chillin' Resort?' A few mumbled yeahs came at the question. "Well, I found the resort part east of the Grand Square!"

"That we did..." said Bunny visibly less excited. "Bloody big hill with a ski lift installed and a shack where a Monobear bloke was renting out skiing equipment and snowboards and sleds. The whole deal."

"Ok... but did you find something USEFUL?", asked Flynn, unimpressed.

Merida glared back at the Ultimate Thief. "Well, did YOU find somethin'?!"

"Don't dodge the question!"

"Well, don't do it too, either!"

"Arrgh, we didn't find anythin' else, only that!", shouted Bunny, breaking up the petty dispute.

"Well... at least we found something else to do here!" said Rapunzel with forced optimism. Not gonna lie... all those things do sound fun. But now is not the time. Nick's face isn't looking very jolly right now and that's never a good sign.

Next, Hic tells everyone about the A/V Room, the Final Death Room and the forge. When Hic reveals to everyone that the resort was modeled after Berk, everyone reacts with surprise. Of course, no one can explain why. "Maybe Monobear is only messing with me?" he says tentatively.

That... doesn't sound right but I can't think of any other explanation. So... is the Headmaster just playing around.

In the silence that follow us, suddenly North clears his throat. As all eyes fall on him, the Ultimate Sculptor stands straight up to his full height while he holds the blue folder Tooth mentioned.

"As we investigated Great Hall, Tooth here found most upsetting document.", said North as he opened the folder and dropped it on the middle of the table. Photos of students we didn't recognize and sheets of paper were inside... but there was something in the photos that stood out.

Monobear.

"Apparently, we are not the first ones to be subjected to Mutual Killing nonsense.", said North with a grave expression.

"What do you mean, Nicholas?", asked Pitch as he picked up a photo of a girl with messy dark hair, big glasses and a nervous expression.

"This file mentions an incident similar to what is happening to us called 'The School Life of Mutual Killing'." said Nick with a tired face, "And it took place in Hope's Peak Academy."

Stunned silence filled the entire restaurant at his words.

"You're kidding, right?!", asked Flynn, but Nick's shaking head answered the rhetorical question.

"But that can't be...", said Elsa.

"I never heard about something like that ever happening!", said Rapunzel.

"Me neither. I wouldn't have accepted the fucking invitation if I had known that!", shouted Snot.

"How could Hope's Peak Academy allow such a thing to happen?", said Tooth, aghast.

"They did not sponsor this.", said Nick as he looked over the files strewn on the table, his eyes focusing on the picture of a thin boy with a black and olive hoodie, messy brown hair and gray eyes, "The file says that a Puppetmaster infiltrated the school and took over, forcing the 15 students trapped inside to kill each other."

Puppetmaster forcing them to kill each other...?

"So, M-Monobear was behind that too?", said Fishlegs as he took in all the information.

"He is in the pictures..." said Merida as she looked a picture of a very buff looking woman with long white hair fighting the aftermentioned bear.

"I guess this means that Monobear isn't affiliated with Hope's Peak after all...", said Hic as he looked at a picture of a girl with short brown hair, a green button up shirt and a brown skirt.

"Then... what the bloody hell is he? If he's not with Hope's Peak... then who is he with? And how could he get away with this once and do it again?!", asked Bunny, looking angry.

"I do not know." said Nick as he rubbed his left eye with his hand, "The file does not mention the identity of the Puppetmaster nor its fate."

"And... what of the students?" asked Elsa.

Nick shook his head. "The file only details their ordeal until only six of them remain... after that, the report ends abruptly."

Well, that's disappointing, but expected. I doubt Monobear would leave such important details on the open. But it does raise some



questions...

"Who made this file anyway?" asks Tuffnut as he glares at a picture of a guy with spiky black hair, white uniform and red eyes.

"The file bears a logo unlike any I've seen before. Apparently, the organization that made this file is called the Future Foundation.", says the Ultimate Sculptor.

"Never heard of it.", says Ruff with a shrug.

"Me neither...", says Anna. I sincerely doubt any of us know about it.

"Do you think they're the ones that imprisoned us here?", asks Rapunzel, her eyes darting here and there as she looks around the room.

"Hey, yeah! Maybe Monobear is working with them!", shouts Snot as if he had figured everything out.

"I guess that's possible...", says Hic, to my surprise, "I mean... I don't think a single person is capable of pulling this off... twice at that! So even if the Future Foundation isn't behind our imprisonment... I think its safe to assume that Monobear isn't working alone."

A hum of agreement can be heard across the room.

"But... why?", I suddenly speak up. "Why would they need to do this again if they did it once already? What's the purpose of repeating the same thing?"

"Maybe they're just sickos?", offers Tuffnut.

"Or maybe they're trying to achieve something?", says Tooth.

"But Monobear's goal is supposedly to make us despair... was that his goal back then?", says Hic, looking deep in thought.

"What was it that he said at the Class Trial? That he wanted to 'show everyone that Hope is infinitely inferior to Despair?'," asks Pitch.

"What kind of shitty goal is that?!", says Snotlout.

"One that he takes very seriously, mate...", mumbles Bunny, looking aggravated. "I mean, look at how far he went before and now... this bugger is serious."

Despite how nonsensical it is to us, it's clear Monobear is fully committed to his goal. But despite all we've heard, we only ended up with more questions. This whole thing... is obviously bigger than we imagined, though. It goes beyond a simple kidnapping, that's for sure.

With a sigh, Nick speaks up again. "Alright Fishlegs, give us your report." The Ultimate Encyclopedia actually yelps with surprise, unable to say anything as he sees everyone focused on him. Rapunzel takes pity on the blonde and speaks up for him.

"Fishlegs, Peter and I investigated the library on the edge of the resort. There were lots of interesting books there! Like, for example, one about how to make a rollercoaster in your backyard and one about the effects of zero-g on porpoises and-!"

"Ugh, just what we needed, another Fishlegs." groaned Ruffnut, interrupting Punzie's ramble.

"So more useless factoids then? I was expecting something important, the way Hiccup talked about you three." said Flynn, to Hic's and Punzie's embarrassment.

"We did find something important!" shouted Fishlegs annoyed as he grabbed a book from a chair behind him. A rather... old one at that.

"What is that musty old thing?" asked Elsa, clearly unimpressed.

"This... is Hope's Peak Academy's student record. It contains all the students that have attended the school." said the Ultimate Encyclopedia clearly proud of himself.

"...And?", asked Tuff, his eyes narrowed.

"Well, you know how our ElectroIDs show the hour and date?", asks Fishlegs.

"Well, that's quite the topic change, but yeah." says Hic as he tries to follow Fishlegs' train of thought.

"Well, this book naturally records the entry dates of all the students. However..." the blonde boy pauses, looking uncertain, "There's some peculiar things about ourselves in here."

"You see... right now, the year is obviously 2014 right? Well... the registry date for our class is actually 2009."

The information starts to sink in.

"That's crazy talk mate! I clearly remember enterin' the school on 2014!", says Bunny, obviously not taking the information well.

"Yeah, me too! There's no way I forgot the date either!", says the Ultimate Heavy Lifter as he slams his fist on the table, making Fishlegs flinch.

"Hey, don't get mad at me! I'm just telling you what the book says!", protests the Ultimate Encyclopedia.

"And that's not all...", says Punzie. "The book has profiles of us on it and... the pictures used on the records... look exactly like us. As if we hadn't aged in those 5 years."

"But that is clearly impossible!", says Nick, his eyes wide.

"I don't feel any different." says Tuff with a shrug.

"Me neither... still a talking fishbone... same as the day I entered the Academy." says Hic with a half-hearted laugh.

So what gives? We all remember entering the Academy in 2014 but the records state that we entered 5 years before? And that we apparently didn't age in those five years? What the hell? How can we even explain that?!

"Ugh... my head hurts." says Ruffnut as she lets her face fall on the table.

"Maybe Monobear did something to us?", said Anna.

"You'd better not say something ridiculous like 'he made us immortal', Anna..." warned Elsa.

"Of course not!", said the Ultimate Hiker, with an indignant scowl, "I meant... maybe he messed with our brains and that's why we remember things differently?"

"It's possible...", I conceded, "I mean... I'm living proof. Monobear sure messed with me good; I can't remember a thing about myself or my talent."

"Weeeell... about that." said Punzie hesitantly, her eyes looking at the book in Fishlegs' hands.

"Huh? What do you mean by that?", I ask, but Rapunzel seems to realize that she spoke without thinking, because she clams up. I focus on the Ultimate Encyclopedia, who is fidgeting as he looks at me.

"Fishlegs... what's wrong?" I ask him tentatively as I see the large boy's eyes, filled with... distrust?

"I... I don't know if I should say this...", says Fishlegs, clearly uncomfortable with the attention he's getting.

"Just speak up and be done with it!", demands Merida.

"It's just! Oh crud...!", shouts the Ultimate Encyclopedia as he runs a hand through his hair. "Jack isn't here!"

...

Huh...?

"What do you mea-", begins Nick, but Fishlegs continues to speak, his eyes shut tight as he does. "Jack's profile isn't here! Or anywhere! He's just not in the school records at all!"

...What?

"But how could that be?", asks Tooth, confusion clear on her face. "I mean, he us a student of Hope's Peak Academy, right? So he should be there, right?"

Yeah... I should be there... so why?

"It's because Jackson isn't an Ultimate Student. That's why he's not

there." says Pitch suddenly, throwing a manila folder on the table over the Future Foundation file, a profile with a picture of me clipped on it.

But the picture... that boy looks like me... but his eyes... are not blue... and his hair is brown...? Not white? That... can't be me. And yet the profile clearly reads 'Jackson Overland'... So... why?

"What is the meaning of this, Peter?!", asks Nick, outraged.

"Yeah! Jack... is obviously an Ultimate! That's why he's here, because of an ultimate talent!", says Hic in my defense.

"But that's where you're wrong, Haddock.", says Pitch as he looks at me with disdain. "Jackson isn't an Ultimate at all. He doesn't even possess a talent. He's just a normal, average, talentless teenager from \*\*Hope's Peak Academy's Reserve Course\*\*."

...Haha... This... is a joke, right? Pitch is just trying to get a rise out of me, right?

Soon he'll smile creepily and he will say something like, 'Just joshing you'. Right?

...Why?

...Why?! Why isn't he saying it? He can't possibly be serious?

"What are you talking about?", I hear Hic say.

"I know you are confused. I was too when I first found this file stashed away on the library, but allow me to explain." Pitch's silk-like voice can be heard clearly through the restaurant, everyone's attention on him.

"According to this file, Hope's Peak Academy's student body is composed of two branches." He lifts two fingers as he speaks. "The main branch is the one we belong to, the Ultimate Class; the one that educates those that possess an Ultimate talent." Yellow eyes land on me and a sneer appears on the pale teen's face. "And the Reserve Course branch, where the normal, talentless hacks who want a taste of Hope's Peak Academy's glory pay their way in. That's the group Jackson belongs to."

That... can't be...

"So... the reason Jack can't remember his talent?", says Elsa, trailing off.

No... I just! Forgot it! I have a talent!

"It may be because he never had a talent to begin with." Pitch says. "He's not one of us; he bought his way into the academy."

"H-Hold on...! That's not true! I...", I want to protest but, "I do have a talent! I... just forgot it but if you give me more time I'll-"

"Hey...", interrupts Flynn, his eyes narrowed as he looks at me, "Didn't Monobear say the traitor was 'pretending' to be our friend?"

What if..."

"Shut up, Flynn!", screams Merida at the Ultimate Thief. "Are you even hearing what you're sayin'?! There's no way Jack is the traitor!"

"Yeah, guys... Like... jumping to conclusions because of a file that may or may not be real? We can't do that...", says Hic looking more determined than usual. "If anything, we all know Jack by know and sure, he's a little prankster and obnoxious sometimes, but he's our friend! I trust him."

I'm relieved to see them rising up to defend me, and to see that they trust me. But...

As I look at the supposed picture of me, doubt starts to grow within me. Is that really who I am? A nobody? But then what about my flashes of memory?

Who am I? What happened to me...?

A buzz resounds on the quiet room, and one of the monitors lights up, Monobear's unamused face showing on it.

"Um... it is now 10 PM! Night Time has begun! Please vacate the premises and return to your cottages, you bastards. Have pleasant dreams and don't let the traitor get you! Puhuhuhu!"

With a sigh, Nick steadies himself. "Guess this meeting is adjourned. Go and rest. We will talk more about this in morning.

Despite being surrounded by people as they filed out of the restaurant, I felt lonely. Somehow, hearing everything Pitch said... made me feel inadequate. Because, even if the file is fake... I just realized how different I am from everyone. No memories, no past... and maybe no talent at all.

I don't belong here... or anywhere else. I don't have anywhere to go back to.

Someone bumps into me and I turn to see Hiccup, looking at me with inquiring eyes. The auburn-haired kid huffs before grabbing my wrist, forcing me to follow him out of the restaurant, Toothless greeting us as soon as we exit the building.

We walk in silence slowly through the camp, not a sound can be heard except those of our steps, Hic facing forward all the time, preventing me from looking at his face and from gauging his emotions in those telling green eyes of his.

Having enough of the silence. I plant my feet on the ground, forcing us to stop. Hiccup looks at me with a confused expression, his eyebrow arched. "Jack...? What's wrong?" he asks before a grin spreads on his lips, "Don't tell me you're scared of the dark?" he jokes, just like we always do. As if nothing was wrong.

It's bothering me more than it should.

"Why?", I ask the confused Viking, "Why are you still hanging out with me?". I should be grateful about this, but I just can't believe

Hic accepted the news so easily.

Said Ultimate Lucky Student snorts at my question, rolling his eyes. "Really, Jack? You think I care if you have a talent or not? Look at me, I mean..." he gestures to himself "I got picked by a raffle and I'm a walking disaster. I don't think I'm in any position to judge."

Hic lets go of my wrist and walks closer to me, putting a shy hand on my shoulder. "Believe me, you could be the Ultimate Toilet Cleaner or just a normal teen, but you're... you're still you, Jack. Talent or not, I'm your... your friend, OK? Nothing will change that. Reserve Course or not."

A warm feeling spreads on my chest at those words. I guess Hic did mean what he said back at the cable car. I can't express how grateful I am. So instead I chuckle and decide to joke back. I guess... that's the best way to show that his words reached me.

"Really Hic? 'Ultimate Toilet Cleaner'?", I tease.

The Viking blushes and looks away, flustered, "S-shut up. I panicked and blurted the first thing that came on my mind!"

"So whenever you think of me, a toilet pops up in your head?", I snicker, "You really have your mind in the gutter."

"I-it's not my fault your stupid white hair reminds me of a toilet!"

"Hic, you hurt me. It doesn't remind you of fallen snow? You're not very romantic, are you?"

"Who says this has to be romantic, you jerk?! That's it... this is the last time I'm cheering you up.", He threatens with a pointing finger.

"Oh nooo, anything but that!", I shout exaggeratedly as I drop to my knees and hug him, "How could I ever survive without your quality company?!" the truth of that sentence lost to him.

Hic squirms uncomfortably but doesn't try to break away from the hug, opting to chuckle nervously instead. I can feel his lithe frame under the fabric as he moves around... Huh... he's smaller than I remember... but that only makes me want to hug him more tightly and feel his warmth... but I control myself. I don't want to make this more awkward than it is for him.

"Y-yeah... you by yourself... haha... I bet you wouldn't last a day." He says.

I probably wouldn't.

And thus we joke and banter all the way to our cottages. I steal glances at Hic whenever he isn't looking and I can't help it. He's... just too interesting. The way his hair bounces when he moves faster than usual, the way he gestures when he gets excited... How his freckles only stand out more when he blushes at one of my comments.

Needless to say, the moment we say good night to each other comes too soon for my liking. But even though we learned a lot of unsettling things and even though those facts and possibilities about me are swirling on my mind... all of them are overpowered by my thoughts of Hic.

...Damn, I really like him a lot, huh?

And for the first time in what feels like forever, I fall asleep, content, without any nightmares visiting me.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>MONOBEAR THEATER<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Maaan, I bearily appeared on this chapter... This sucks!"<p>

"I'm the mascot character! Law dictates that I need to appear in all scenes in any given story, no matter how forced it feels. I won't stand for this neglecting of my character.

"From now on, Monobear will now appear in all sentences of this story. That's just how Monobear it is. It will be a Monobear story with a 100% more Monobear!"

"I Monobear hope you enjoy it! Look forward to your Monobear pal appearing more now!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Don't worry, Monobear was just joking. Or was he? I guess you'll figure it out soon.<br>\*\*

\*\*I guess I should mention now that this story will have Danganronpa and Danganronpa 2 spoilers :^)\*\*

\*\*Thanks for the reads, you guys! Please do remember to keep voting and reviewing if its something you want. I mean, if you do vote, you'll be able to get to know more about the characters, and I'll get a fuzzy feeling in my heart in return as I read your reviews that curse my name for killing off characters. It's a nice trade off!\*\*

\*\*All joking aside, see ya soon! Next chapter will probably be slow and nice and definitely shorter than this. How do I know? Call it artistic license!\*\*

## 17. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days C

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Lives C\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Huh... this one actually took a while. But we're back and...! Unfortunately this is a rather sedated chapter. I'm sorry for that. At the very least, you'll get to read Free Time with Peter!

That's going to be unique.<strong>

**\*\*I've been told I update too fast. That's because I actually have tons of drafts already written. The draft pile doesn't stop getting taller. So I just finish the chapters and I post them. Hopefully the next one will be up soon.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I woke up well rested the next day, thanks to the fact that I didn't have a single nightmare. I almost wanted to sleep in, but I'd rather not worry Hic and the others, so when Monobear's morning announcement came, I grudgingly got out of bed. Deciding to change my wardrobe a bit, I swapped my blue pull-over hoodie for a zipper-toting blue one.

After getting dressed, I went out of my cottage to pick up Hic like always, but to my surprise, the little Viking was already up and waiting for me outside with Toothless, a nervous smile on his face. The gesture made me happy for some reason.

"Wow, you actually have more clothes aside from that blue hoodie?", said Hic as he took a look at my new get-up.

"Yup!", I said as I unzipped the hoodie, leaving it open to show off the white shirt underneath with a blue snowflake on it.

Hic rolled his eyes before muttering, "Of course, it has to be blue..."

"Shut it, freckles. As if your green and dragon ensemble was better." I said as I took a look at Hic's shirt. He was now wearing a (predictably) green long sleeved t-shirt with a round, boulder like outline of a dragon on the chest. The Ultimate Lucky Student blushed before saying "TouchÃ©."

At the urgency of Toothless, we made our way to the restaurant. I... wasn't looking forward to going there, but not going would actually make things worse, so I had no choice. Besides, Hic was with me and he being there was actually enough for me.

As expected, as soon as we entered the restaurant the room got quiet. I could feel the eyes of the others on me, but what hurt the most was the fact that some of them outright ignored me; Flynn in particular bothered me because I thought we had a pretty solid bond but the Ultimate Thief didn't even look at me as I walked past him and greeted him.

The only saving grace was the fact that at the very least I wasn't being attacked like Hic and that Merida and Aster had decided to join us two for breakfast. But the fact that everyone else wasn't trusting me...

"You OK, Overland?", asked Bunny as he looked at me with an inscrutable expression. I blinked in surprise. Was I making a face? Merida and Hiccup were looking at me now too.

"I'm alright.", I said with a forced smile. I didn't want to worry



them this early in the morning. Besides, there was nothing to be done. I doubt I can make everyone trust me easily again, but that doesn't mean I'm giving up. I'll... win their trust back somehow.

Bunny and Merida turned their attention to their food, and so did I. But even as I took a bite of my breakfast sandwich, I could feel Hic's probing gaze. I guess I didn't fool him...

Nick called for everyone's attention after everyone finished their food, looking less grumpy than yesterday but still carrying that 'all-business' look. "Alright everyone. We shall begin today's meeting!"

"But what are we going to discuss?", asked Punzie.

"How about what are we going to do with the traitor?", said Flynn as he gave me a sideways glance, "We could alw-OW!"

The Ultimate Thief got interrupted by Merida's well-aimed plastic cup, leaving a red mark on Flynn's forehead, to the Twins' and Snot's delight.

"Nice shot." murmured Bunny to the Ultimate Archer.

Nick sighed. "No, we are not discussing traitor, for there is none. Instead, I would like to discuss plans for escape."

Elsa arched an eyebrow. "Oh? But I thought you were the one that said 'Let us try to live here in peace'?"

Nick shook his head slowly. "I wanted that, but after seeing that file and Monobear's actions, it would be foolish to stay here any longer." The Ultimate Sculptor cleared his throat. "So this is what we will discuss today. Let us brainstorm ideas for escape."

Snotlout was the first one to speak up. "Uh... why don't we just climb it? The wall, I mean?"

"Uh, how?!", said Merida with a roll of her eyes, "That thing is ridiculously tall an' like, completely smooth!"

"Trying to get a secure footing on such a smooth surface..." said Pitch in a quiet voice.

"It's impossible!" shouted Anna, "Take it from the Ultimate Hiker! Climbing that thing is not possible!", she finished looking proud of herself.

"Uh... you don't need to be an Ultimate Hiker to see that...", mumbled Hic, and I had to snicker.

"Plus, aren't there like, tons of guns and that electric wiring?", said Flynn as he continued to rub his forehead, "How do you propose we get over those?"

By now Snotlout was red from embarrassment. "Y-you'll see! I'll climb that wall and escape and then you'll have to beg for my forgiveness!", and after shouting that, the Ultimate Heavy Lifter crossed his arms and started to pout.

"Forget climbing, that's too much work.", said Tuffnut with a roll of his eyes.

"Let's burst our way through instead!", said Ruffnut with a dangerous shine on her eyes. This ought to be good...

"Thanks to these books and like, all that free time... we have tons of explosives at our cottage!", said the Ultimate Destruction male.

"So we can totally set them all to detonate and blow a big hole in the wall! BOOM!", said Ruff as she made an explosion motion with her arms.

"Escape route secured." finished Tuff, looking pleased with his plan.

"Uh... will it be safe?" asked Fishlegs, speaking for all of us in the room.

"Safe?" said Tuff confused. "Never considered that..." continued Ruff. Oh boy...

"Relax Fish. It's only 10 tons of explosives. We've worked with bigger loads." said Tuff nonchalantly.

"Where did you even get 10 tons of explosives...?!" asked Tooth aghast.

"We have a lot of spare time." said Ruff, looking bored, her brother shrugging nonchalantly.

"Does anyone else have a more sensible plan?", asked Elsa, exasperation shown on her face.

"Oh...! If only we could fly over that stupid wall!", whined Rapunzel.

"Why don't we use the dragon?", asked Flynn, jerking his thumb towards the door, behind which Toothless was.

Hic looked down at the table, his expression hidden by his bangs, "Toothless... can't fly anymore. The accident damaged his tail fin. Without it, he can't control his flight or stay in the air. He'll crash before long." The tone of his voice seriously made me want to hug him, but ugh...

"Isn't there anything you can do?", asked Anna, who upon seeing Hic's reaction, decided to walk up to him, worry showing in her face. "Is there a way to fix his tail?", she continued, putting a hand on the little Viking's shoulder. Seeing her do that... awoke something inside of me that I hadn't felt before. I got angry... seeing her touch Hic... I wanted to push her away but... no, why? It's not like... Huh? Why am I even getting angry? This is a stupid... reaction.

"Something I can do..." Hiccup's voice brought me to the present. The little Viking was chewing his lip, his brow furrowed in concentration. "Maybe... but no... I need materials and a... a forge!

That's it!" shouted Hic, excited all of a sudden.

And then he hugged Anna. And she returned the hug with a... dumb grin... on her face...!

Suddenly pushing her away didn't seem like a bad idea.

"Thanks, Anna! You gave me the push in the right direction."

"Y-you're welcome Hiccup..."

Hearing that tone of gratefulness in Hic's voice... was just too much. I had to look away from the scene. I really... really hated that! I didn't want to acknowledge that it had happened.

"What's this all about, kiddo?" I hear Flynn say. To my relief, that breaks up the hug, Hiccup oblivious to how much that had bothered me, and leaving Anna looking visibly disappointed. I really shouldn't get so happy about that, but I can't help it. This feeling is so foreign and disgusting... what's wrong with me?

"I think... I may be able to fix Toothless' tail..." says the Ultimate Lucky Student slowly, as if trying to choose the best words to express himself. "It's gonna take time and materials... but if everything goes fine, we'll be able to fly over that fence!"

"Well, if we can't find the exit before that, then I guess we have our back-up plan.", says Rapunzel with her head tilted, before flashing a smile. "We're counting on you, Mr... I mean, Hiccup! Oh and on Toothless too!"

Hic turned slightly red at Punzie's comment, his nervous habit of rubbing his left arm with his right hand showing. "I-I'll do my best...! Like I said, it's gonna take a while and I might need some help so-"

"I'll help!" I blurt out far more louder than needed, and the way everyone is looking at me, the way Hic is looking at me with a confused expression... I suddenly feel very self-conscious. I don't know a lick about forging, but I suddenly want to be with Hiccup more!

Just... what the hell is going on with my mind?

Thankfully, the small Viking takes my outburst in stride, smiling awkwardly but nodding at my offer for help.

"Very well, Hiccup. We will leave that to you." says Nick with a nod and an actual smile on his face. "Anyone else have more ideas for escape?" he asks, but the restaurant remains silent. Since no one else decides to speak up, Nick gives everyone a curt nod before standing up. "Alright then. You are dismissed for now. Let us strive to find way out. Do not hesitate to inform us all if you find something important!"

And with that, the meeting was adjourned. Immediately after that, Hiccup turned to face me with a probing gaze, his green eyes scanning all over my face slowly. "Uh... is there something on my face, Hic?" I ask, suddenly nervous about the way he's looking at me.

The little Viking smiles to himself and shakes his head. "No, I was just trying to see if I could figure out why you wanted to help me with my plan."

Well, there was no way I was going to admit that I volunteered only so that Anna couldn't offer her help. And there was no way I was going to admit that I also did it just to spend more alone time with him.

"Well... I-I... just wanted to see you work! Yeah!" I offered, the Ultimate Lucky Student rummaging the excuse before nodding. "Gee, are you really looking forward to see me mess up?", he narrowed his eyes with a mischievous grin on his face.

"What? No! I really am interested! I mean, I've never seen forging in action so I just... y'know... thought I could see it and learn from you?". Why am I trying to justify myself to him?! He doesn't really mind that I'm volunteering and he's joking most likely yet I feel the need to prove to him that I'm serious!

Is... is it me or is it hot here? Damn it... why am I wearing this stupid hoodie?!

Hic obviously looks confused at my explanation, his head tilted as he watches me with a searching gaze. "Well... if you're really serious about it and you want to learn... I guess you can be my assistant of sorts? I mean...", he says as he averts his gaze. "You're not going to actually do any forging or anything... you'll only pass me the tools. I... don't want you to get hurt or anything. Does... does that sound well?"

I nod eagerly, ready to leave this pit of awkwardness I buried myself into.

The little Viking shifts his weight and sways his arms, clearly not knowing what to say. "So... I guess... I'll see you later at the Grand Square? I need to, uh, make some designs first... draw and stuff... pretty boring things... so yeah, how about we split up for a bit? I'll IM you when I'm done."

"Yeah! Sounds good, see ya later Hic!", and with that and being unable to take the awkward atmosphere any more, I exit the restaurant perhaps a little too fast.

As I make my way to my cottage to cool down, thoughts flood my mind.

Jack, what the hell is wrong with you?! First that whole thing with Anna that made me livid... because...? I don't know! Why did I get angry?! And what was up with me after that?! Why did I get nervous all of a sudden around him?! I've never been like that around him, because there's no reason to be nervous around him! He has never judged my actions! So why do I feel the need to prove myself in front of him?

...Whatever the reason, I need to calm down. I can't keep acting like this around him or I'll end up worrying him and making things awkward. I need to get my act together so I can help Hic later.

...Maybe I should actually learn something about forging? Guess a trip to the library is in order in that case...

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

"What's with him?", asks Aster as we see the retreating figure of Jack.

"I have no idea." I answer sincerely. Jack was sure acting weird. He's always so laid-back and yet today he looked jumpy and unsure. "Do you think he's OK?", I ask Merida and Aster, my worry seeping into my words.

"Oh, I'm sure he's alright", says the Ultimate Archer with a grin. Huh... she almost looks like... she knows what's wrong with him.

"Do you... know something, Merida?" I prod, but the redhead simply shakes her head with an amused grin.

"I have a hunch but... I can't tell ya Hiccup. He'll tell ya when he's ready."

Well, if that wasn't a cryptic remark! But if she says Jack is OK...

With a shrug, I turn to leave. "If you say so... in any case, I'll see you guys later!" I didn't want to leave but... I had to do my part in our escape. I didn't want to be alone but I also had this thing where I didn't like people seeing me drawing. It made me nervous, having an audience, so I had to do this by myself.

After saying my goodbyes to my friends, Toothless and I returned to our cottage. My idea was simple on paper; If Toothless' lack of tail fin was the problem, I simply had to supply a replacement. I had never attempted anything like this, but I had to try. Not only for our sake, but for my bud. I knew he missed flying a lot, despite the Night Fury's strong front. So if I could help him... it would make all the struggling worth it.

Of course, bringing my idea to life was going to be hard. Getting the measurements was a mission on itself, as Toothless didn't keep still long enough for me to get them. After chasing the Night Fury around my room (For almost 15 minutes! Gosh, Toothless this isn't a game!) and getting the dimensions down, I next started to sketch out the designs.

I went through a lot of them, often having to remind myself that the design had to be practical first, flashy second (What can I say? I do love a bit of dramatic flair in my inventions...), and after admittedly tearing out 5 pages full of designs out of my sketchbook, I finally settled on a simple one: one similar to Toothless' other tail fin.

Having the design out of the way, I had to procure the tools and materials next. Thankfully, the supermarket had everything I had in mind. I had to wonder, though... the amount of foresight that went into making this camp is impressive. All things said, the fact that

Monobear created this place with Toothless in mind was... odd. As if he had planned this for a long time. And I still couldn't figure out how he knew about dragons or how he even got one! Dragons were rare and only lived near Berk, so how...

OK, I should stop getting distracted. It's true that it bothers me but thinking about it without any clues is pointless, and asking the Headmaster? Even more pointless. So I had to focus on what I was doing. With the help of Toothless, I carried everything I got back to the cottage and stored them in a box. Carrying this over to the Grand Square is going to be a nightmare... Why didn't I ask Jack for help?

...Probably because I didn't want to get distracted by looking at him. How am I even going to survive the forging session with him tagging along?! Praying to Thor that I would leave the forge with all my limbs intact, I grabbed the sketchbook with my design notes and dropped it in the box along with everything else and with Toothless in tow, I left my cottage.

\* \* \*

><p>Designing the tail fin and picking up the materials took longer than I expected, and by the time I left the cottage, it was past noon.<p>

However as I stepped out into the Lodging Area, I noticed someone by the fountain. That black ensemble of clothing was unmistakable; it was Peter... or 'Pitch' as Jack liked to call him. Wondering what was he doing by the Fountain, I left the box near Toothless and approached him slowly by myself, the Night Fury still not fond of the Ultimate Fear Expert.

"Oh, hello there, Hiccup.", said Peter nonchalantly as he noted my approach, his eyes lingering a bit on me before returning to watching the fountain.

"Hi... um... what's up?" I said, trying to strike a conversation with in hope of learning what he was doing.

"Oh, nothing much, really.", he said with smile. "I was just remembering this one person who was utterly terrified of water. Seeing this fountain... brought back those memories, I guess."

"Oh." was all I could say. That was... kinda creepy.

"Am I really that upsetting?", asked Peter with a confused look.

"Wha-?!", Nah... he couldn't possibly... have read my mind... right?

Peter chuckled at my outburst. "Oh, I'm not a mind reader, Hiccup. I just have very good intuition. Comes with my talent, is all." A grin spread on his face. "Besides, it's obvious that you aren't comfortable with my appearance."

I sighed. I didn't want to be rude but... "Yeah... I guess I am kinda creeped out a little. You just look like.. I don't know... someone that would kick a puppy and laugh?"

Peter considers my words before his expression falls a little, barely noticeable. "I... was afraid of that, pardon the pun."

Huh? I thought he dressed like that to scare people? I mean, he was the Ultimate Fear Expert, so naturally scaring people came with the job description, no?

"You seem to think that I enjoy being scary..." ACK! Can he stop doing that?! "But that's a mistake. I believe I said before that I only want to help others, right?" says Peter with a thoughtful look.

I nod. I did remember him saying so.

"Well, I can't really help anyone if they aren't comfortable enough to talk with me...", he says, and... maybe I'm seeing things, but I thought I saw loneliness in his eyes for a brief second.

"Well...", I said as I tugged at the hem of my shirt, "Maybe if you changed your wardrobe a bit, you'd intimidate people less?"

"Hmm... a wise suggestion... but...", and for the first time, I see a flash of insecurity on Peter's face. "I really... don't know how to do that. I've always dressed like this so..."

...You're seriously not saying that you only wear black?!

"Hm... troubling... but if I want to help others... But how do I start? Where do I..." mumbles the Ultimate Fear Expert as he strokes his chin.

"You... really want to help others... huh...", I say as I begin to believe his claims. The black haired teen nods at my comment. He sure is dedicated, that's for sure.

"I know this is bold of me to ask all of a sudden, but..." says Peter with a serious expression. "Would it be out of line to ask for your help?"

I'm taken aback by the question, but he looks serious. "A-re you that desperate for help? I mean... asking me for fashion tips? Really?", I say, nervous.

"Well, you're the only one who even talks to me, so yes... I AM asking this of you." He got a point there. What did I get myself into? "It doesn't have to be today, but I would really like for you to come with me to the supermarket to grab something that will make others comfortable around me."

Should I... help him? He really seems to be in a bit of a pinch, and after learning that I'm the only one who even talks to him...

"Alright... I'll do it. Don't expect much from me, though. I don't really have a good taste of fashion..."

A wide smile spreads on Peter's face. "On the contrary, my dear Hiccup. I'm very much looking forward to that day. I expect a lot from you." His smile turns into a grimace, "Unlike that phony

Jackson. Talk about a disappointment."

OK... he can't badmouth Jack just like that! But before I can say something, Peter turns to leave. "I'll see you another day, Hiccup. Looking forward to it." And without even looking back at me, he left.

Peter Black...the Ultimate Fear Expert. He certainly looks the part. But despite his fearful exterior, the teen really shows a genuine interest on helping people, even though I'm not really sure how he does that just yet. Did I also imagine that hint of loneliness in him? And why does he loathe talentless people? He certainly is... an intriguing individual.

And I still can't believe I agreed to help him shop for clothes!

Walking away from that awkward encounter, I picked up the box I left with Toothless and set off for the Grand Square.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

It was 2 PM and I wasn't any wiser on the subject of forging. On one hand, I had learned a lot about handcrafts (I especially liked origami) but no matter how much I searched, I couldn't find a book about Hic's work. Sighing in defeat, I walked away from the bookshelves and plopped down on one of the chairs next to the tables that were set up on the center of the library.

I didn't dwell much on how disappointing my results were because my ElectroID started buzzing suddenly. I fished it out faster than I cared to admit, and sure enough, an IM from Hic was there, just like he promised:

"Hey Jack! i've got everything ready so how about we meet at the grand square? i'm on my way already! Toothless says hi, by the way!"

I smiled and typed out a response hurriedly.

"sure hic ill see ya there and tell toothless his hi has been received :)"

A feeling of excitement and nervousness ran through my body as I hit send. I couldn't wait to see Hic in action; if I had learned anything about him, it was the fact that he was far more talented than he let on. But I was nervous about getting in his way. Either way, I was looking forward to it.

"Hee hee, going on a date, are you?"

Monobear's sudden voice made me jump out of the chair. Landing hard on my butt, I glared at the bear who was looking at me with a shit-eating grin.

"I don't get it, Frosty..." began the Headmaster as he rubbed his chin in a contemplative way, "You could have literally anyone and you fell for Hiccy? I must say your tastes are despair-inducing!"



I stood up fast, anger surging through my body as the bear looked at me with an amused expression. "What do you want?! Can't you see I hate seeing your stupid face?!" I shouted.

Monobear simply giggled. "Gee, I only came to give you romantic advice and you yell at me... I mean." he turned his back to me, his arms crossed behind him, "It's truly hopeless, you know? Falling in love with someone who isn't endgame material... I wouldn't recommend it."

"What do you-", I started to ask, but the Headmaster interrupted me.

"I'm just saying! Why go for someone who is such an obvious kill? Why not go with someone who will surely survive? Like... if it were up to me, Hiccy would have died on the Prologue but I'm not the author of this tale, ya feel me? To me, he has this expendable character vibe that almost makes me want to push him off a cliff...", said Monobear as he spun to face me, a mocking grin on his face.

"Hiccup... will definitely survive.", I spat at the Headmaster. "I'll make sure of it, you'll see!" There was no way I... was going to let someone get Hic. Not any of the other guys, nor Monobear. Said bear merely laughed at my face.

"Ah, the refreshing foolishness of youth! I love it... I love it when fools in love make those empty promises full of bravado because...!", his red eye flashed, "Becauuuse... when those promises get broken, beautiful despair always follows! I can't wait, y'know? I can't wait until it happens!"

If it weren't for the rules, I would have chucked the bear a book. So, instead, I walked away from him, feeling myself shake with fury. I didn't need this... didn't need to hear Monobear's empty taunts... I had somewhere else to be.

"Don't blame me when things inevitably go wrong!" He yelled as I left the library. Things weren't going to go wrong... I wouldn't let them. He was going to survive... and we were going to escape. No matter what Monobear said.

\* \* \*

><p>It took me a few moments to calm down but by the time I arrived at the Grand Square, my head had cooled down. My mood became more cheery as I saw a familiar thin frame and a Night Fury approach me. Hiccup was balancing a box full of things I didn't recognize rather precariously and I was glad I decided to walk up to him to offer my help because he tripped. I caught him and the box before he fully tipped over, and he apologized softly.<p>

"Apparently, snow makes me even clumsier.", he said as he kicked at the white substance with disdain, and I had to chuckle at that gesture. With box in hand, we started walking towards the forge, making small talk along the way.

"Were you waiting for long?", he asked as we entered the forge and took the box off my hands.

"Nah, I was already in the area. In the library." I said as I saw the auburn-haired kid take out the contents of the box one by one and setting them up on a big table.

"Oh?", he turned to face me with a sly grin. "I thought reading wasn't your thing?". Toothless entered the forge, sniffing around the room curiously, and Hic called him towards a big... empty thing I didn't recognize. It was made out of metal. They did that whole 'communicating without words' thing they had done before and within a few seconds, the big empty thing's insides were alive with fire courtesy of the Night Fury's plasma blast.

"Well... I... wanted to read about something... about how to forge and stuff..." I said as I felt the heat from that thing (I'm going to have to ask Hic what's the name of that!) spread through the building.

"Huh?", said the Viking as he opened his sketchbook to a page full of things I didn't recognize. "Why? Jack, I'm going to do it all by myself. I don't want you to get hurt." he said as he looked over the page, nodding to himself.

"But I want to help!", I protested.

"And you will! But! I'm not going to let you handle the forge without experience!", he said as he crossed his arms and looked at me with a stern expression, to show that he was standing by his decision. "Trust me, you'll help me in other ways!"

He... had a point. "Fine." I conceded, trying to not pout, but failing. Hic smiled at my expression and nodded. The Viking took out an apron from the box and put it on and then he grabbed the sketchbook and walked over to me.

...Damn, did that leather apron fit him well... I MEAN.

"So... what we're going to do is this..." said Hic as he stood next to me, the brush of his shoulder sending an electric current through my body. I tried to concentrate on what he was saying, though. "We're going to make a prosthetic tail fin for Toothless. With this, he'll be able to fly again and we can escape. Theoretically."

I swallowed hard, and nodded. I didn't know why but I felt fidgety from standing so close to Hic. I had the sudden urge to do all the things my memories showed me but I had to control myself! Geez, is this what happens when you have a crush? This sucks... "Sure! Let's start!", I said more enthusiastically than I had intended, walking over to the box in order to put distance between us and calm down.

To my torment, though, Hic walked up to me and put a hand in my shoulder, exacerbating those thoughts more. "Hold on...", he said with a grin as he pulled me away from the box. "You're going to help me with something else."

I stood there confused as the Ultimate Lucky Student rummaged through the box before putting a roll of leather, some scissors and... a needle and thread on my hands. Hic bit his lip as he saw me stare at him with a confused look before grabbing his sketchbook again and showing me a different page from the previous one.

"You're... going to help me make a saddle for Toothless.", he said with a bit of hesitation. "Y'know... for comfort during flight and... yeah." He said as he rubbed the back of his head, not really looking at me. "Can you do that?"

Well, I had never done something like this but I did learn something about handcrafting today so... how hard can it be? "Sure!", I said, feeling confident all of a sudden. Hic seemed to relax a bit at my answer. The little Viking gave me the page and with everything in hand, I set off to work in another table across the room. Toothless was curled next to the table and as I approached it, I could swear the Night Fury was looking at me with a smug expression...

Dismissing the thought (There was no way Toothless would know about my crush, right?!), I focused on my task. Thankfully, Hiccup had foreseen my lack of experience and the page he had given me was full of instructions and details on the diagram. I had to marvel at the amount of detail the sketch of the saddle had... this kid was really something else.

Volunteering to help Hic was both a good and a bad idea. Good because I was learning something new. Good because I got to hang around Hic. And good because I was doing my part to help. But it was bad because I kept getting distracted by the little Viking going at it. Honestly? I would've progressed far more quickly with my saddle-making task if I hadn't been so enthralled by Hic; he completely transformed when he was working. Normally, Hic had this nervous, pushover-like look (Even though he wasn't like that... entirely.), but the guy I was seeing right now was totally different.

His green eyes, normally darting here and there, were completely focused as he worked the metal. His movements, usually clumsy, were practiced and calculated as he hit a thin iron bar with a hammer in order to straighten it out. His fingers moved deftly as he assembled the wireframe of the prosthetic, quickly gaining shape as the little Viking toiled away. I had to look away when Hic went to wipe away the sweat of his brow with his forearm; God damn it, if this is torture for a prank I did in my past, I'm sorry.

Unfortunately, Hic caught me looking at him. Thankfully, he misinterpreted my gazing for something far more innocent. "Are you having problems with the... ah, saddle, Jack?", he asked with a worried expression. Toothless snorted next to me and that was my cue to return to work. "N-no... I'm doing okay! Really!", I said, cursing myself inwardly for stumbling over my words.

A loud sigh caught my attention. "Okay, you've been acting weird.", said Hic with an accusatory tone. "You know you can tell me anything, right?", he said in a softer tone, "I won't judge you or anything. Unless it's a stupid joke."

Right... you say that because you don't know what's happening inside me. But... maybe I should just... say it? I mean...

With a surge of courage out of nowhere, I turn to face him, ready to confess and... upon seeing his probing eyes, I lose my nerve. Well, almost all of my nerve. "Well... actually... I've been wondering...", I begin, and Hic's face softens as he listens, his arms crossed.

"Err... I know this sounds weird but..." C'mon... Jack! Ignore the heat on your cheeks! Just shoot!

"I've been wondering if... ah, are you like... interested in someone... Hic?"

...

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT JACKSON? That was NOT what I wanted to ask! Well, kinda but not like that! Way to shoot and miss the mark!

"Buh-wha?... excuse me?", says Hic, stunned by my question.

"Yeah... um... that. Like, do you like someone Hic?" I babble, cursing everything as I find myself dealing with the consequences of my question. The little Viking blushes as he hears my question again and he starts shuffling nervously in place and immediately my thoughts wander to the worst-case scenario- The Anna scenario.

"What the hell Jack... wh-what brought this up..." he half-mumbles, not looking at me before his head snaps up, eyes wide as he scans my face before narrowing them. "Wait... you've been acting weird because...?"

Did... did he figure it out? Did he discover my crush? Well, he is pretty smart, after all... I wouldn't be surprised-

"Are you in love with someone Jack...?" he says, his voice almost a whisper.

...I guess he doesn't really know. But why does he... seem afraid all of a sudden.

"Hey, don't dodge the question...!", I say to him louder than intended.

He scowls. "I-I'm not! I'm just... you know, answering yours with a question of mine...!"

"Hic, that doesn't make any sense."

"I-it totally does...! So!" His blush intensifies now. "Are you...?"

"Answer you first...!"

"No, you!"

"C'mon, I asked first, so answer you first!"

"But I was the one who asked you first if you were alright so... technically I asked first! So! Answer you first!"

This was silly. And we had raised our voices louder than intended to. "Argh... fine! I do, OK?! I LIKE someone! There, happy?!", I shouted at last, getting fed up with the childish back and forth.

â€|

Awkward silence.

Hic's expression slowly changed from one of shock to a blank expression as he processed my outburst. "Oh..." was all he said as he lowered his gaze, not looking at me.

I felt bad for shouting at him, and this silence between us was getting awkward, so I cleared my throat before speaking. "Sorry for shouting, Hic... it's just..." I sighed as I ran a hand through my forehead, "I've never been in love with someone and I don't know what to do... how to be around them... that's why I've been on edge. And I... was wondering if you knew what to do...?"

Hic laughed hollowly, still not looking at me as he answered. "Well, I'm not really a romantic expert Jack. I wasn't exactly Mr. Popularity back in Berk... so I'm in the dark about all this, just like you..." The Ultimate Lucky Student turns back to his work, fully focusing on the prosthetic on the table as he continues his talk. "So... who is it, anyway?" He asks in a weird voice.

"Err... well... it really doesn't matter who it is..." I answer and I want to punch myself in the face. "I mean, it's not like they'll ever like me anyway. "

Another hollow laugh escapes from Hic's lips. "Well... you won't know unless you ask them. I mean, I guess that's the logical thing to do but what do I know?" he shrugs, "I mean, I know for sure I... would never get the courage to confess because they would certainly reject me... but you?" He turns to look at me and his smile... seems distant. "I'm sure they'll reciprocate if you tell them your feelings..."

Hic... is acting weird. But his advice seems logical... And yet... "Do you really think so...?" I ask him, still nervous and unsure about confessing.

"Sure, sure." he waves dismissively. "I mean... you're kind of a pain in the butt and a real knucklehead sometimes but... you're smart, you're nice, you're supportive and you know how to have fun." He pauses for a bit as he returns to look at the prosthetic fin. "Anyone who rejects you... yeah, I'd think they'd be a bigger idiot than you, if that's possible." He finishes that sarcastic remark with an awkward chuckle.

I take his words to heart. Yeah... I can... I can do this! If Hic really thinks that, then I'll..!

"Oh? And what do we have here?"

I groan as I hear that cartoony voice. This is the last thing I want to deal with. Sure enough, Monobear appears on Hic's work station, looking curiously at the prosthetic in the freckled teen's hands. "I see, I see... yes, beary interesting..."

Hic instinctively steps back, hiding the prosthetic behind him before glaring at the bear. "W-what are you doing here?!", he says, obviously shaken up.

"Hmm? I was just curious... and bored." says the Headmaster

nonchalantly. "I mean... I heard noises and yelling so I thought for sure a murder was happening already! Alas... it was just you two having a lover's quarrel. How disappointing..."

"So sorry about that..." said Hic with clear sarcasm dripping from his voice. "I'll be sure to call you whenever someone tries to kill me so that you don't miss it."

The Headmaster, however, looked bored of Hiccup and instead walked over to my table, much to Toothless' dismay. The bear jumped clumsily on my table and looked at my halfway done saddle with mock interest. "Gasp!", he suddenly exclaimed, faking a blush, "Jackson, you naughty boy! To think that you're into horseplay... you're even making a saddle and everything!"

What? What is... that? I don't like how he said that... and apparently neither did Hic, as he looked extremely flustered.

"Geez, you guys... don't forget that rule before you do anything rash, OK? I don't want to punish you but if you guys get this naughty...", continued the bear, looking extremely amused.

"Shut up! It's nothing like that!", shouted the Ultimate Lucky Student, "Me and Jack... we would never...!"

My heart sunk. Oh... so... we would never... be what? Be together like in my memory? Does that mean he doesn't... feel that way?

The Headmaster's boisterous laugh filled the room. "Hahaha, chill! I'm just pulling your leg! Like I care about teen drama! Unless it has to do with killing! In any case, no murders are happening right now... so I guess I better fix that! Look forward to something soon! Buh-bye!" and with a wave of his paw, Monobear left the room, mumbling to himself something undecipherable.

I should be worried about that claim... I should... but right now, my mind's still reeling. Because Hiccup just rejected me. Sure, he didn't say it to me... but he still said... that we would never...

...Damn it... this really hurts...

"Talk about ruining the mood..." said Hiccup, as he visibly deflated. Yeah, you have no idea... "I think we should wrap up for today...", continued Hic, oblivious to the storm inside me as he looked at his ElectroID. "It's late already and I'm not really in a working mood now..."

"Yeah..." neither was I. I wasn't... in the mood for anything. I just wanted to lie down alone for a bit.

We made our way back to the Lodge Area shortly after tidying up the forge, and though Hic tried to lighten up the mood as we made our way to our cottage, I could tell he could tell my heart wasn't on it. By the time we reached our cottages, we went our separate ways with an awkward farewell.

Today... just didn't end as good as it had started... No, this day totally sucked. Having an unrequited crush sucked and I was sure things would go wrong one way or another soon thanks to a certain

scheming bear.

My mind was swirling with so many negative thoughts that I didn't notice when I fell asleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>MONOBEAR THEATER<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Object permanence is such a weird concept! Like, things continue to exist even when you aren't looking at them? What gives them the right to do that? What a self-centered attitude!"<p>

"Things should stop existing when I don't acknowledge them! The whole world should revolve around me, Monobear!"

"...Wait... are you even looking at me when I talk to you?"

"Suddenly I feel very nonexistent..."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>:,( <strong>

\*\*Please do not hate me. Not yet. The worst is still to come. But hey, I'm trying to give them some breathing space before shit hits the fan. Meanwhile, I guess you guys can keep suggesting for more Free Time characters? Just so you know, it's OK to suggest a character you already hung out with.\*\*

\*\*But that's neither here or there. Be seeing you soon! And now back to my writer's lair.\*\*

## 18. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days D

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days D\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sorry for the lateness! These past days have been absolutely brutal! I moved countries and I was job hunting so my writing time took a gatling gun to the head. Incredibly busy time of the year! Hopefully this will stabilize soon because I miss writing hahaha!<strong>

\*\*Kind of a sedated chapter And short too. But its a transition one and its going to lead into a lot of things later on! No Free Time Events for now. Next time, a certain Ultimate Encyclopedia is going to get his time to shine! Thanks for voting!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Jack was starting to worry me. When he came up to pick me up, he seemed so out of it, his cheeriness and his smiles forced. His

responses to my verbal jabs were simple 'yeahs' and blank stares and he looked like... well, like crap. Like he hadn't slept at all.

Was this really because of his so called crush? Did things go bad?

I was afraid to ask more about that.

It came to no surprise to me that Jack was interested on someone. Really, someone like him would certainly get a date with ease. But I had deluded myself into thinking that perhaps I had a chance... that the bond we shared meant something more. But it turns out I was wrong; we were simply going to be good friends. And nothing more.

And yet, it still hurt. It hurt me and it was silly because I was suffering for something that was never there to begin with. This one-sided crush was always going to end in disaster and getting too invested had cost me. But... there was nothing else I could do. Of course Jack would fall in love with someone else. And how could I compete against any of them? There was never a chance for me...

So... even if it hurts me... more than he'll ever know (it's not fair)... I'll support him... I'll help him be happy (Thor, it's not fair...!)

Or that's what I tell myself. But... but I can't bring myself to ask him more about the subject (You're a selfish brat, Haddock). I'm... not ready yet. But that doesn't mean I can leave him alone and sad like this. I need to find a way to cheer him up.

It's not like I'm the only one that's noticed Jack's weird mood, either. As soon as we entered the restaurant, Merida immediately questioned me when she saw Jack's face.

"Did ya two get in a fight again?"

Aster saw Jack's face and immediately commented with a smirk. "Gee, Frostbite, you look like crap. You should stop pickin' fights with the ankle-biter."

Predictably, Jack didn't react to Aster's jab. This made the Ultimate Survivalist scowl. "Ok... somethin's definitely wrong with the kid. What's wrong with him, Hiccup?"

I truthfully answered that I had no idea. Jack might as well not be there because no matter how much the other two asked him, he didn't react at all. This of course made us all worry even more, but before we could even ask him again, the Twins interrupted the breakfast meeting.

"Alright! We're wasting daylight here! Let's get going!", shouted Tuffnut as he pumped his fist agitatedly.

"But we have not even started breakfast meeting!" protested North.

"We won't need any of those where we're going!", answered Ruffnut, "After this, we'll be out of this camp for sure!"



"Does that mean...?" began Fishlegs, but the blonde boy was interrupted by the Ultimate Demolition Team's raised hands.

"You got that right! We're blowing up that wall!", said Tuff, "Right here, Right now.", finished Ruff, both twins wearing big smirks as they ran out of the building without looking if we we're even following. With a collective sigh, we all followed the noisy duo, our interest picked by the outcome of their plan at least a little.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

It was with silent trepidation that we arrived at the Camp Gates. To our surprise, the school bus we all arrived in was still there. Guess Monobear was just that lazy. But now, the Headmaster's vehicle wasn't the only thing here. Somehow, the Twins had managed to bring all their explosives to this place, and there was an incredible variety of them. All imaginable shapes and colors could be seen on the pile of explosives and if I had any memory of these I might have been able to identify some of them.

But to be honest, my mind wasn't really focusing on the explosives.

I... still was hurting from yesterday. To think that I had a chance with Hic... I truly am an idiot. Of course those memories of mine... were fake. There's no way he and I would ever... be together. It was either a trap from Monobear or wishful thinking from my part. I should just... move on. Forget these silly feelings...

...But I can't. I can't stop feeling this way. I can't stay away from the lil Viking. I really wish I hadn't realized I was crushing on Hic... I just wish we could return to just being friends without any stupid feelings inbetween. But I can't return to that. It's so unfair... but I also can't stop being friends with him. He's... the only one who believes in me fully. He really is a true friend. And even though I REALLY WANT to hold him and never let go and... damn it! And even though I really want to be more than friends... I guess... being just that... is OK with me.

I just... have to concentrate... on something else!

Like the Twins' escape attempt.

From where I was standing (By myself. I was trying to keep my distance from Hic a bit in order to make this more tolerable), I could see the two blondes running around the pile of explosives, setting things up with a grin on their faces, snickers escaping their mouths at random intervals. I... was a little worried, but interested. I'd never seen explosives in action... or at least I don't remember seeing them, so I was curious, to say the least.

"Looks like they're having fun."

That nasally voice that's tormenting me comes from next to me and I can't help it- I tense up.

Hiccup is standing next to me, looking a bit nervous as he looks at the Twins work their magic. And despite everything I said, I find him being nervous kind of adorable... I really am hopeless, huh?

Trying to move away from that thought, I stop staring at him and I focus on the Twins as they bicker over something inane like always. "Yeah, they sure do love bopping each other's head." I answer him with a forced smile.

Hic chuckles next to me and shakes his head and despite how much I'm trying to ignore him, I pay attention to all and every motion and sound that comes from him.

"So...", he begins, hesitating while he rocks on his heels and this catches my attention. He wants to tell me something?

"I don't want to jinx this or anything but..." he says as he gestures at Tuff who is currently tackling Ruff, "After we're done with this uh... do you want to, like... go to the skiing resort with me...?"

This took me by surprise. No, not the fact that the Twins' plan wasn't going to work; the fact that Hic asked me to hang out with him like this. But... it's just a simple hanging-out deal... yeah, there's no other meaning behind it. Don't get your hopes up, Jack. It's just a friend thing.

"Uh... sure!" I said, trying to force a smile. "I don't... mind! But... uh, why?"

"Oh, well...!" he said, rubbing the back of his head with an awkward gesture, "I... did promise you to show you how to have fun with the snow, didn't I? And...", he faltered as his expression fell, "You... kinda look like you need to have some fun so... yeah?"

So that's it... I guess I wasn't doing a good job at repressing my feelings... Of course Hic would notice and worry. He's... worried about me... that's why he asked me to go with him.

Damn Hic... your kindness kinda hurts but I'm grateful you're my friend. I just wish we... No. Stop. Focus on having fun! Do it for Hic!

"Oh?" I say, with an actual feeling behind my voice. "I still don't know how fun and Hic is possible but if you say so..." I tease. To be honest, I'm curious about what kind of fun he's talking about.

The little Viking's face brightens upon hearing me say that and despite the rolling of his eyes, I can see relief spreading all over his being. "Prepare to be blown away, frosty twig."

"Did someone say blow away?"

Ruffnut's voice interrupts us and as we turn to look at her, we see the twins looking at us expectantly, Tuffnut holding a small device on his hand.

"Is that the signal?", asks Tuff to her sister.

"We have a signal?", she answers, confused.

Tuffnut shrugs and with a sly smile, he runs towards the group with device in hand, his sister joining us shortly as we back away even more. I don't know much about explosions, but I do know that a safe distance is essential so...

"Alright..." begins Tuff as he shows us the small device, his thumb hovering over a red button, "On 3, I'll press this and the bombs will explode, OK?". You could sense how tense everyone was... this was the moment of truth. If this worked, we'd be able to escape. But before we could even nod in agreement to Tuff's question...

"Huhn? Whatcha doing, you bastards?"

The cartoony voice of the Headmaster silenced us all. I looked in the general direction of the voice and there he was... Monobear... inspecting the explosive pile. Oh no... was he going to sabotage us?!

"Three!" yelled Tuff all of a sudden, and before any of us could react, the explosives emitted a soft beep and then the world became enveloped in a white flash and a deafening boom. It took me few seconds in the aftermath of the explosion to realize that I was on the floor, the power of the explosives knocking us all down, even at a distance.

I'm seriously never messing with the Twins ever again.

With a groan, I groggily got on my feet and, rubbing my eyes to adjust them to natural light, I looked at the place where the bombs had been set up.

Predictably, and yet despairingly so, the wall stood intact. Despite the ridiculous amount of explosives and the power of the explosion, the wall only had singe marks to show. It stood tall and strong and completely unperturbed. And still keeping us prisoners.

"Guess we need bigger explosives...", said Ruff, looking visibly disappointed.

"I... don't think that's a good idea..." said Flynn as he rubbed his rump. I had to agree... explosives are one kind of fun I'm not delving into any time soon.

"Hey... is that...?" said Tooth as she pointed at the remains of the explosives and upon looking at where she was pointing, I let out a small gasp.

Yes... even though only a leg remained... it was undoubtedly Monobear. Or whatever was left of him. Did he get caught in the explosion? Talk about a lucky break!

"Seems beast was not fast enough to escape." said Nick with suppressed happiness.

"Is he... really gone?" asked Punzie, eyeing the remains of the Headmaster with worry.

But before we could get any hope from that possibility...

"Geeeee! You guys...! You made me waste a spare!" said Monobear as he popped right in front of us, fuming in the literal sense of the word, completely unharmed, "And this happened because you were up to no good! Seriously, I should spank all of you a 1000 times! Such naughty children!"

"No way... he's still alive!", said Snot, looking pale.

"Of course! If you really want to kill me dead you have to go through my Shadow Clone Jutsu Army of 1000! Nyahahaha!", said Monobear as he cackled boisterously, his red eye glinting. "But seriously... don't do that, OK? If you guys keep doing this naughty stuff, I'm gonna punish you all, OK? I'm going to have to make this a new rule..." and sure enough, the faint sound of all our ElectroIDs buzzing with a new notification alerted us to the new rule.

**\*\*Handling of explosives is prohibited! The only one who's allowed to make an explosive impression is Monobear now!\*\***

Damn it... we didn't accomplish anything and now our movements are more restricted? This blows.

"Puhuhu! So... did you really think you could escape like this?" said Monobear, his paws covering his mouth as he giggled, "Useless! You should just be nice kids and live your lives peacefully... kill each other... and do other teenager things instead of wasting your time with meaningless acts like these! There's no escape aside from surviving the Class Trial, so... do your best, OK?!"

Monobear's parting words... somehow made this failure feel even worse.

"Weeell..." began Fish, an uncomfortable expression on his face, "I guess we learned that Monobear does have spares... so this wasn't a complete failure, right?"

"It was a complete failure!" shouted Ruff, looking mortified. "This wall didn't even budge, we wasted tons of nice explosives and now we can't even use them anymore?!"

"I agree sis, this completely and utterly sucks.", supplemented Tuff, looking crestfallen.

"I guess everything is up to you, Hiccup." said Pitch, looking completely unaffected by the Twins' failure. He almost looked like he knew they were going to fail. "We're expecting great things from you."

The Ultimate Lucky Student stuttered at Pitch's comment, but before he could even answer, Snot interjected, looking indignant; "Hey! There's still my plan!"

"As Mr. Black was saying..." continued Elsa. with an annoyed face at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, "It seems you are our last hope, Mr. Haddock. We are counting on you."

As everyone ignored a sulking Snot and looked expectantly at Hic, I couldn't help but feel bad at all the attention he was getting. He looked extremely nervous, sweat collecting in his brow. He laughed nervously before saying: "Geez, no pressure at all...", the sarcasm

obvious in his voice. "Don't worry... I got this... just give me some more time." he added, this time more seriously.

And with that confirmation, the rest of the group dispersed slowly, leaving only the Viking, Toothless and me on the scene. Not wanting the silence to settle between us, I turned to face Hic with a teasing smile.

"So, O grand savior, are we going to work on the means of our escape now?" I asked, in a mocking grandiose tone of voice.

Hic merely rolled his eyes. "No, first we're getting you out of your funk, Jack. Come, we have a date with the skiing area." ...Why is he blushing?

"Uh, shouldn't we give priority to our escape, Hic? I mean, I'm all about fun but...", I said, trying to be somewhat responsible.

Hic shook his head. "Nah. If your mind is troubled, then you won't be able to work well. So, we're sorting out your issue first." he finished with a nod.

I know a way you can sort my issues Hic... with a ki- DAMN IT.

"I GUESS that's true..." I conceded. Either way, I was spending time with him like a masochist sucker, so I couldn't complain. "Very well, Hic, lead the way!" I said, more enthusiastic than I should be allowed to be.

Taking that as his cue, Hiccup started walking towards the Mountain Pass, a faint smile on his lips. Unconsciously, I had a smile on me as well. This... probably meant I was really looking forward to this. I had to laugh, really, I just keep tormenting myself. And I found that I liked that.

Suddenly all the times Hic called me an idiot playfully seemed to actually reflect the truth.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

Like Bunny and Mer told us, there was indeed a skiing resort west of the Grand Square. Why would Monobear even install a thing like this on a literal prison on the first place was beyond me, but I wasn't going to complain. A lot of the things that Monobear did didn't make sense in the first place. He certainly could make our existence and stay here far more hellish but instead he gave us a lot of commodities. I couldn't understand him, but then again, the Headmaster was night inscrutable and his way of thinking even more so.

That didn't deter me from enjoying the distractions he provided, even if he was trying to set us up for murder.

The skiing resort, named Slippery Slope in the ElectroID map, was exactly that. A giant slope littered with snow off the mountain-side. And just seeing this place, surrounded by evergreen trees also blanketed in snow, made me want to jump right into it, skiing or anything else be damned. I just... really liked snow and the cold in

general. To me, it held endless possibilities, fun and it heralded the coming of spring, of new life. It sounded cheesy, I know, but that's how I felt.

And now, Hic was going to teach me how to have even more fun with it. I was literally jumping in my spot, much to Hic's and Toothless' amusement.

But, as we stood next to the contraption known as the ski loft, fully outfitted in winter clothing courtesy of the rental cottage near the loft, I realized I had no idea what skiing was or what Hic was supposed to show me. He was holding a weird board thing, colored green... but I still didn't know what kind of fun he was going to show me. Were we going to bash each other with this?

Hiccup saw my confused state and smiled knowingly. He took the board-like thing with his mitten-clad hands and put it in front of him with ease. "Ever heard of snowboarding?" he asked.

I shook my head, not bothering to mention that there were a lot of things that I hadn't heard off due to my amnesia. Seeing my denial, Hic took a deep breath before speaking:

"Well, snowboarding is a sport that you practice on slopes like these", he gestured to the slope behind us. "Uh... basically, you slide down the slope on this board at full speed."

I... think I understand... but... "Is that really fun?" I asked, unsure. It seemed rather... simple.

Hic looked a bit troubled but he nodded. "Trust me, it's better than what it sounds like. I'll bet you 10 bucks that you'll want to try it once you see it in action."

I snorted as I saw a hint of enthusiasm on those emerald green eyes of his. "Hic, we don't have any money, remember?" He really... looked alive when he talked about things he liked.

"Oh, you know what I meant!", said the Ultimate Lucky Student as he grabbed the snowboard and went to ride the loft, "Just watch and... be prepared to be amazed...!"

"Sure, whatever you say, Hic!" I shot back jovially. I was actually curious about this whole 'snowboarding' deal and while I didn't see the fun on it, I just had to know about it. It was with an awkward wave that Hic rode the lift, and as I saw his retreating figure (clad in a green sweater and dark blue wind pants), my excitement rose gradually. By the time Hiccup was at the top of the slope (which was perfectly clear of any obstacles and had a nice slant, not too steep nor too flat) I was ready to burst with excitement; I couldn't wait to see whatever what snowboarding was in action.

"So this is where ya two goofs ran off to!"

The heavily accented voice of Merida made me jump. Haha, I guess my focus was on Hiccup too much. The Ultimate Archer was looking at me with a wide grin, the redhead showing off a deep green sweater, blue scarf and some brown snow boots along with black snow pants under her usual dress. "When I saw ya two scurry off like that, I had my suspicions..." continued Merida, advancing on me with a smirk that

honestly made me step back a bit. "...And I was right!" she shouted practically on my face. "You guys are so obvious, seriously!"

I... have no idea what she's talking about. "Uh, what? I'm just going to see Hic snowboard." I said as I pointed at him on top of the hill, getting ready to do... whatever he was going to do. The Ultimate Archer looked over to where I was pointing and a genuine look of surprise appeared on her face. "Huh... Didn't know Hic had that in 'im... he really is a bag of surprises!"

I nodded. True, I didn't know what snowboarding was, but Hiccup was certainly more than what he believed. He constantly undermines himself, yet he seems to have a nice variety of skills and he's also pretty smart. And unlike me, he has an actual Ultimate skill, even if he says it's a phony talent. He really was a bag of surprises. A bag that I wanted for myself- dang it.

Trying to get my mind out of that train of thought, I instead focused on the Ultimate Lucky Student, who looked ready to go. After a quick thumbs up from him that we returned and a moment of hesitation, Hic got on his board and he began his descent.

Hic not only undermined himself; he undermined everything, including snowboarding. Because what I was seeing was completely unlike what he told me. His description didn't make it justice.

At first, he started slow, but soon enough the Ultimate Lucky Student began picking up speed until he was a literal green blur. But he wasn't only moving at an unreal speed, no, he wasn't just sliding down the slope. The way he wove between the little snow mounds, how he snaked around and how he slid over them without fear of wiping out... he even jumped from the bigger ones and did horizontal flips without hesitating... and his face had this absolute look of pure concentration...

And it looked so much fun...! The way he did all these big turns, how he almost effortlessly sailed over the air and how he performed those stunts...!

Yes. Snowboarding looked awesome! It looked fun! And Hic... he looked so...

"Whoa, Hiccup IS good!"

Exactly. Merida took the words out of my mouth. Hic was good... and he looked good.

"Yeah... he's amazing." I said, unable to take my eyes off the little Viking. I even laughed when Toothless decided to slide down the slope, accompanying his friend but without clashing with him. The Night Fury moved with the movements of Hic, almost as if this were a routine to them.

"Ayup, that he is." Said Mer, looking pleased as she saw the little Viking clear a slope with practiced movements. "So, when are ya gonna tell 'im?"

"Huh?", what is she talking about? "What do you mean, Mer?"

The redhead rolled her eyes, either because of the nickname or my

question, before speaking: "Obviously, I mean when are you going to tell 'im that you love 'im, dingus."

...Wait, what? D-did my brain short-circuit or did my hearing go bad...? She couldn't possibly... wait what.

"Uh... W-what do you... mean...", No... she couldn't be talking about... Sheesh! Why is it hot all of a sudden?! It's freezing and yet this stupid heat in my cheeks...!

"Please, Overland. I ain't blind! Like I said, you two are so obvious!", she answered, looking exasperated. "Really, I'm surprised Hiccup hasn't noticed! The way you flirt is so unsubtle I'd thought you'd start makin' out on the spot!"

Yeah. I didn't think I could blush harder than what I am right now. God...! Guess the cat's out of the bag, huh? "...Was I really that obvious...?" I said in defeat.

Merida rolled her eyes once again. "So, like I asked. When are you going to tell 'im?"

I swallowed hard and looked away from here. This part of the conversation again... "I... won't tell him. Hic doesn't feel like that about me..." I mumbled, and that pain I was trying to ignore came back again, a hollow feeling spreading on my chest.

Merida snorted and that made me look at her. This isn't funny...! Why is she...?! "Oh Jack...!" She said with a knowing smile. "When I said you were obvious... I mean ya two you goof!"

Huh? "What do you-" but before I could continue, she shushed me by putting a finger on my lips.

"Do I really have to explain it to ya? Really? How couldn't ya have noticed?! The way he acts around ya... how he always looks at you when he thinks ya aren't lookin'â€¦ how he cares about you and always hangs around you before any of us?", she shook her head after waiting for me to answer her questions, me unable to do so because I was so shocked.

Did... did that stuff really...? No way... Really?! "So... what... are you saying that...?", my voice quivered due to my disbelief and... a growing sense of hope. "You really think he... that Hic...?!"

She snickered as she saw my expression, which I could see reflected in her eyes. "Wow, boys are so dumb. I ain't even interested in this stuff and even I could tell."

But... if what she says is true... then... "But... he said to Monobear we would never be..."

"Never be what?", she inquired, suddenly looked alarmed. But to my... err, embarrassment? I... just realized...

"Err... well...", oh man. I think I... jumped the gun back there when Hic said that... "Never mind!" Yeah, that... is a really big assumption I made back there. I can't believe I had all this doubt inside of me just because I let my fears form conclusions... "...So,



you really think Hic is...?", but I still had to ask, in a hushed tone. I didn't want to make a mistake and ruin everything.

"Hey, I don't think I'm wrong but...", says Merida and her expression falls a little. She almost looks... wistful?, "It's better to ask and find out than never doin' ' so, y'know? I definitely think you should tell 'im... before its too late or someone else gets to 'im."

At those words, a mental image of Anna appeared in my head. Yeah... I don't think I want that to happen. "Yeah, you're... you're right!". I can't hesitate anymore. It's better to ask and find out the truth... than to never find out.

"That's the spirit, Jackie!", shouted Mer, and I was too excited to get mad at her nickname of choice. Yeah... I'm definitely going to tell him! As soon as he gets here, I'm gonna tell him how I feel-

A loud static noise filled the area, making us all flinch. I turned around to see the ski lift and sure enough, a monitor was there. And that monitor was flashing with static. No... not now!

That odious visage, and that annoying cartoony, laid-back voice soon came afterwards. "Hey, so um...", began the Headmaster, leaning his head on his left paw, "I'm bored, y'know? You are all having fun without me and that's completely unfair and not good for my health. You're literally driving me to death with your peaceful lives! What this camp trip needs is action...! Adrenaline...! And cheap acting skills!", Monobear rambled on as he waved his arms agitatedly. "And the only thing that can provide that kind of entertainment is... movies! So! How about we watch a cool movie together, you guys?"

Wait... what?

"I see you're all curious! Don't worry, my movie taste is top-notch! I even made a movie myself! The Wizard of Monomi... ah, those were the days...", continued the Headmaster, despite our confusion. What... is he plotting?, "Anyways! Please gather at the A/V Room! We're going to have a despairfully delightful time! Toodle-oo!"

And with that, the monitor went dark, leaving us in the dark as well.

"I don't like this..."

The sudden voice of Hic made me yelp in surprise. Toothless and the Ultimate Lucky Student were standing behind me, looking at the monitor with a grave look. "Yah, I feel ya...", agreed Merida. And the feeling was mutual, too. There's no way... Monobear is going to show us a normal movie. This is definitely a trap. And yet...

"I guess... we should get going...", I said without any emotion. I didn't want to do this, but the Headmaster was very clear with his rules. If we defied him... we were going to be punished. And there's no way I would put Hic in that kind of danger. Not before we escape and not before I tell him...

But that's not important right now.

With a hum of agreement from my friends, we slowly made our way out

of the skiing area, the snowboard discarded, and we walked towards the A/V Room, a feeling of apprehension in my heart.

What... is the Headmaster's plot this time?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I've been writing as Jack a lot lately huh... guess I find him interesting to write! In any case, sorry for the tease!<strong></p></strong>

**\*\*Hopefully the next chapter will be up soon!\*\***

**\*\*See ya!\*\***

## 19. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days E

**\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days E\*\***

**\*\*So sorry for the wait. I did say I had lots of drafts written and I did promise faster chapters because of this, but alas, I underestimated the beast that is night shifts and being a responsible adult. Nevertheless, here we are, with another completed chapter, hope you enjoy!\*\***

**\*\*On to the list of things that I promised but that I failed to live up to... I said there was going to be Free Time with Fishlegs but sadly, I had nowhere to insert it on this chapter. But there's always the next one, yeah? \*\***

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong></span></p></strong>

It was an hour later after Monobear's announcement that we all gathered in front of the A/V Room. Naturally, everyone looked apprehensive; nothing the Headmaster did was simply for fun. Everything had a meaning, a reason... all the things he did were done in the name of despair for all of us. So we were wary. Even Jack looked antsy.

And it wasn't just him. North was tense and silent. Fishlegs and Tooth were more alert than usual... Even Toothless was alert. And Aster...

...was painting eggs?

Wait what.

I arched an eyebrow at the Ultimate Survivalist's actions and he answered me by shrugging his shoulders before focusing on the egg on hand again. "It helps me to keep calm, ya know...?", he muttered as he moved his tiny paintbrush over the oval shape and that's when I noticed that his paint strokes were shaky with nervousness.

Somehow seeing Aster nervous made this whole thing more scary. I mean, if the Ultimate Survivalist

As soon as everyone got together, the Headmaster appeared in front of

us, looking smug and sunny as ever. "Well well! Look at all the turnout for my movie! Guess you guys have good taste after all!". As the Headmaster did a little spin, the door to the A/V Room opened behind him automatically. "But before you get all excited about seeing one of my rocking blockbusters of the summer, I'll have you know we'll be seeing a special screening!"

We don't even know what kind of movie we're seeing so its not like we were looking forward to anything in particular.

"You see...", he began as he walked into the dark A/V Room, us following him warily until he stopped in front of one of the computers with the plugged in headphones, "The movies we're going to watch have been personalized for you! That's right! You're not going to see the same movie... you're going to watch one specifically tailored for your tastes! Aren't I a great Headmaster?", he said and you could detect the totally not subtle pride in his voice.

Snotlout scoffed. "It's probably one of your horrible traps anyway." For a first, everyone agreed with him. Monobear, however, didn't seem pleased with that comment. "Hey! I might be this story's villain, but I'm still proud of my art! I guarantee you guys will be crying from laughing from how tragic this movie is! So get your stupid butts in gear and go to your computer and put on those headphones!", said the bear as he pointed at a random computer in the room. "Choose whichever you like! The movie that belongs to you will begin automatically! Isn't technology great?!"

And with those instructions, the Headmaster left. We exchanged looks between each other; it was clear even in this dark room, we were scared. But it seemed like we didn't have a choice, so with a defeated sigh, we all chose a computer, put on our headphones, and braced ourselves for whatever was going to happen.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>bifurcate POV\_HJ [Hiccup\_POV, Jack\_POV];<strong>

The screen flickered to life, displaying a rotating Monobear head with a 'Now Loading...' sign under it. By this point, I was beyond reacting to all the things having his face, it was something I expected. However, what I did not expect was what appeared after the loading screen faded. Because... because what I was seeing... what this so called movie was showing me...

"...Hello, son."

That enormous beard, that equally enormous frame... the Viking helmet, and the attire... Without a doubt, I was seeing Stoick the Vast, chief of Berk and my father... but why? What is going?

He was facing the camera, sitting on his chair. The video was being recorded in our living room, and it looked as dark as ever, the only source of light being the fireplace, like usual. Dad... err, the Chief looked uncomfortable, looking at the camera without saying anything.

I too was uncomfortable. This man... though I loved him so much... I knew how he felt about me in general. I knew I was a disappointment to him. As a warrior village, Berk values brawn over everything else,

and I certainly was a failure in that regard. Being son of the Chief held some expectations and I didn't even meet the bare minimum. I was sure he was disappointed in me, because I never was the son he wanted. True, I was able to keep the peace between dragons and Vikings thanks to my uncanny ability of understanding them but I still was underwhelming. I still remember the expression his face held when he read why I was accepted into Hope's Peak Academy. It was pure disappointment.

And now... the man I look up to... the one I've been vying for his approval all my life... and the man I failed to impress... is looking at me.

Why? What's the point of this?

"I... don't know where to begin... I'm not good with words."

I snorted at how awkward my Dad looked as he struggled with words. It was true, he was a man of few words, unlike myself. He sighed before continuing, wringing his hands.

"I guess... It's time I was honest with you." He looked at the camera dead-on this time, and I felt nervous all of a sudden. "I'm not... sure if you've heard what the villagers think of you...". At that, I snorted. Of course I knew; they weren't exactly secretive. I knew they disliked me for being a runt. "But...", my father's voice caught my attention. "What they say or think is not important. What matters is... what I'm going to tell you right now. What I really think."

My stomach felt heavy. I didn't... want to hear this. I didn't want to hear it directly from him, how much of a disappointment I was. Hearing it would only make things worse for me. And yet... I couldn't stop looking at the screen; I was glued to my seat with a weird feeling of dread.

"I'm not going to lie to you, son... When you were born... I was expecting something else... and yet you were so small... so fragile... I knew from that moment that you would never be the son I wanted."

My eyes started stinging, and I felt hollow inside. I... knew it. But actually hearing it... it hurt. Actually acknowledging that from the start, I had been a disappointment... it hurt so much. I closed my eyes, trying to prevent the tears from leaving. I didn't want to see this anymore.

"But..."

At that, I opened my eyes again. I stared at my father's face and he... was actually smiling?

"But what I got instead... although you weren't what I asked for... Son, you have to know this: I am proud of you." I was stunned with disbelief. He's got to be lying right? I heard that wrong, right?

"It's true that I wanted a warrior, son, but you... you're special. You are smart, inventive, stubborn and brave. You have become someone I can proudly call my son. No matter what anyone says."

This... this was too much. This is what I... what I always wanted to hear. And he wasn't just saying it. I could see it in his face, beaming. I... I was always afraid that I wouldn't ever measure up to him, to my Dad. And now he was here... telling me I had already succeeded in doing that. I was beyond happy. The tear that escaped my face wasn't due to sadness. It was because of the joy in my heart. I was so happy...! Toothless was next to me, and he was leaning his head on me, purring contently, mirroring my mood.

"Ya had ta wait until ta last minute to tell 'im that, didn't ya, Stoick?"

The sudden voice that sounded was soon followed by the appearance of a man almost as big as dad. He sported a blonde mustache and a hook on his left hand while also showing off a peg leg. But this man was no stranger to me. No, he was an old friend of the family, Gobber. He was also the one who taught me how to operate the forge. Seeing him only made me heart rise with joy. He was a sarcastic man but his heart was made of gold; he was a true friend to my father and I.

"Gobber! You're ruining the moment!", shouted my father with an aggravated look on his face, but I knew by now that he wasn't really annoyed at his friend; this happened way too often.

Gobber just laughed and patted the Berkian Chief on the back jovially, "Well, if ta school hadn't given ya the chance to even send 'tis here message to Hiccup, ya prolly would never have told 'im this! Ya Haddocks were always lousy when speakin' heart-to-heart!"

And at that, I had to agree. Me and my Dad were way too stubborn to and awkward to talk like this... but the fact that he made the effort and that he at least tried to meet me halfway like this... it really made me happy. And seeing these two men who are so important in my life laugh jovially... I was smiling with them.

However, feminine laugh coming from off-camera caught my attention.

"You know, darling, Gobber is right. Why, if it hadn't been for him setting us up for a date, you may have never asked me to marry you."

Said feminine voice silenced both men and for some reason my Dad looked very uncomfortable all of a sudden. And this voice... seemed familiar to me too. As if I had heard it somewhere a long time ago... and yet and I couldn't place where it came from...

My Dad clearing his throat made me snap out of my stupor. He looked like he had steeled himself to do something very difficult, and that made me anxious for a reason. "Son... there is another reason behind this message. Yes, it is true that I wanted, no, I needed to, uh... tell you all these things. I didn't want things to be sour between us so when the school gave me the chance, I accepted their offer to record this message..."

A pause for breath.

And sounds of footsteps as the owner of that female voice walked into

the camera.

A thin woman with hair the same color as mine tied up in a braid, with an angular yet strong face, and wearing Viking clothes appeared before me. She approached slowly towards my Dad, and despite not recalling who this woman was, the way she approached him in such a familiar way and how my Dad looked at her...

And despite not recalling who this woman was... I still had this vague feeling of familiarity inside me.

Who was this woman...? And what did she have to do with Dad... with me? Why was she allowed to appear in this video that apparently was something that the school granted to kids and their families...?

Said woman abruptly turned to the camera. Her expression was... troubled. Hel, Gobber looked uncomfortable and Dad was... wringing his hands.

"You probably don't remember me...", began the woman, looking crestfallen, and I suddenly started to get anxious. "But a mother never forgets."

Those words... Did I... Did I hear that? No, I probably just...

No but, she definitely said that right? That wasn't a glitch in the sound, right? This woman... did she really say that she was... but I thought I...

True, I knew I had a mother. The very fact that I existed proved that fact. But as far as I can remember, she was never around the house. Even my Dad was around the house more than her. and that was an achievement. I never saw her or talked to her. And yet... I feel like I've met her.

The woman in the screen smiled wistfully at the camera. "Haha... you're probably angry at me right now. And you have the right to be. I... wasn't a model mother. It's true that I never visited... but that's the burden I had to carry as the Ultimate Dragon Whisperer."

Wait... what?

The woman who alleged to be my mother continued on, a sad expression on her face. "In fact... the only reason I'm even here... is because Hope's Peak Academy contacted me directly. When I heard that you got accepted into the school, I...", a sincere smile flashed on her face for a second, "I simply had to come and congratulate you.", her expression fell after saying that, "I know... it probably doesn't mean anything to you but... I have to tell you, Hiccup. I am so proud of you. I... truly wish I could have been here more for you, but my duties... "

I... didn't know how to feel. It's true, I was... a bit angry at her. Why? Why couldn't she stay? What was so important... more important than I? Than my Dad? What the Hel does an Ultimate Dragon Whisperer even do?

And yet... knowing that I had a mother... that there was a person out

there that cared about me... and that wasn't ashamed of me...

"The fact that you are here is good enough for me, Val..."

My father's rough voice made me focus. He was looking at... mom with such a tender expression and he looked so happy that I couldn't help but to smile. This was the first time I've ever seen him this happy. And mom... she looked so sad and yet happy at the same time; happy that Dad wasn't mad at her and that she still missed him.

Was this kind of thing... even possible for us anymore? Would we ever be able to interact like this? I would love that... I would love to be there with them.

But for that to happen I have to... get out of here.

"Hey ya two! Knock it off before ya start makin' out right here! Your son is watchin', ya know?", said Gobber, sending the three adults into a fit of laughter. And I had to laugh with them. Yeah... this kind of scene... is what I want my life to be. But for that to happen, we have to escape.

I didn't understand Monobear's motives. This movie he was showing me wasn't filling me with despair. Sure, it confused me a bit but what this movie did was to motivate me more to escape. To look forward to something. I was brimming with hope and motivation now!

And then the video feed cut, abruptly replacing the warm scene in front of me with loud static.

And then, when the static returned, the image I saw left me cold.

The camera was still showing the living room, but it was completely different than before. Dad... Gobber and Mom were nowhere to be seen. And the living room itself was completely torn apart. The chairs were in pieces, the tables were thrown and tipped over. There were broken windows and glass on the floors and long gashes and claw marks decorated the wall. My blood chilled when I saw crimson stains on the walls and the floors.

It was so much to take on... but before I could even register what I was seeing, the image cut off once again, leaving me confused. And to top everything off, the Headmaster's voice started to play through my headphones.

"What happened here in this homely home? What became of the Great Chief, the Blacksmith and the Crazy Dragon Lady Mom? If you want to find out... if you want to see what happened to them...! You just have to kill and leave! Puhuhuhuhu!"

And with that laugh, the movie ended.

Being totally honest here, I didn't know how to feel. This video... had a lot going on. But even so, there was something I was sure about. I was worried. Worried about my dad and Gobber. That scene I saw... something definitely bad happened there. Never in the history of Berk had I seen something like this, not even when the Outcasts attacked.

What happened there... and the fate of... of my family. Were they OK? Were they... alive? The more I thought about it, the more I panicked. A sense of fear started to seize on my heart.

I...

I have to get out of here!

But... if Monobear expects me to kill someone to get out... no, I will not. I... need to do this right. I need to finish that prosthetic and get help. Is this Monobear's plot now? If so... then everyone else... everyone who is watching those movies... are they seeing the same things that I am? Are they being goaded into killing like this, too?

We... walked right into Monobear's trap.

\* \* \*

><p>I did as I was told and put on the headphones while clearly making apparent that I was not happy to follow the Headmaster's orders (I think my scowl was pretty convincing).<p>

Now, I don't recall seeing any movies ever but I didn't have high hopes for what I was going to watch. This was Monobear after all. Knowing him, it was going to be a documentary on torture methods or something. So I braced for the worst as the "Now Loading" sequence played on my monitor.

What appeared on my screen was not within my expectations.

I was expecting dead bodies. Maybe some explosions. Instructions on how to hide a body.

I was not expecting seeing my little sister and my mom (or at least, who I assumed she was. I did remember us talking but seeing her was surreal). And what's more, I didn't expect to see them smiling!

My mom and my little sister Emma and me were facing the camera on the video. We were all on a brightly colored living room that I instantly recognized. Yes... the more that I looked at it, the more the memories started to flood in... From those blue wallpapers that I suggested to Mom back when I was 5 and even more vocal about my fondness for the color blue... To the brown sofa we were all sitting on which Emma and I used to jump on whenever we played... to the little tea table which miraculously survived our antics despite the rest of the furniture in the house not being so lucky...

Yes... everything about the room being shown on the video was calling to me. And that filled me with relief... because it meant... it meant that I truly did exist before. That I was someone and that I had a life before I was trapped in this living hell. And I was seeing it right now... my family and myself, in this video.

They were smiling... and so was I. The happiness I was feeling right now was one that was born from relief. Hic was right... I... was a good person with a good life. I now have proof of that.

I can't believe Monobear thought this was going to make me despair.



There was, however, something very odd in this video. Along with the smiling faces of my sister and mom... there was someone else in that room.

Myself.

I looked exactly like in that file that Pitch brought up, but there was no denying it: though I had brown hair, there was no mistake. The guy sitting next to them was definitely me.

Somehow, looking at myself in that video made me uneasy, but the me in that video didn't look troubled at all. In fact, he was smiling even more broadly than the two sitting next to him. Or I was.

This was going to be so confusing for me. And it was being confusing now. Why... why did I look like in Pitch's file? Why do I look different from now? As far as I remember... I've always had white hair. I don't even remember changing my hair color... I woke up like this.

What is the meaning behind this difference? Well, I guess it really doesn't matter... I mean... What really matters is the fact that it's true. What that file says is true: I am not an Ultimate student at all. I'm just an average talentless student with no special skills. And yet... why am I here with all the other Ultimates?

I could just feel a migraine coming. This video was just making my head spin with questions. Thankfully, my littler sister, Emma, spoke up and that snapped me out of my train of questions.

"Heeeey! Bro! Are you seeing this?", she said as she waved her hand at the camera excitedly. I had to chuckle at her energy and enthusiasm; memories of her and I playing surfaced on my mind and due to that I waved back at her instinctively.

But... why is she waving at the camera and asking me if I'm seeing her? I mean... I am next to her. Of course I'm seeing her do that...

Mom simply shakes her head with a smile. "Settle down, Emma. We have limited time to record this before it's sent to the school, so let's all say what we need to say, shall we?"

Emma looks slightly disappointed and the me in the video chuckles at her pouting expression, which only makes her stick her tongue at the me in the screen. Mom simply sighs at the bickering duo and faces the camera again with a warm smile.

"Well, Jack...! You made it in! After waiting so much for it, you actually got an invite from Hope's Peak Academy! I... cannot begin to describe how proud of you I am, Jack."

She pauses, her smile never faltering, her eyes twinkling with pride.

"I know we already wished you good luck when you left, but well... since the school granted us this chance to send you a video message... we might as well give you more encouragement, right"?

A warmth in my cheeks and my chest spreads. Hearing that my Mom was proud of me... and that she actually was... that I was someone to be proud of! Can you believe that?! Me... someone who is currently a nobody, is actually someone I can be proud of! Those words of praise... make me so happy right now!

Emma snorts before saying in a fit of giggles: "Pfft, I don't know how they decided to give you THAT talent. As far as I know, you're more like the Ultimate Buttface."

The me on the video, oddly enough, bursts laughing. Mom simply scolds Emma, much to her chagrin. There is something odd about this... scene. If that were me, and that's me right?, I would've been mad. And... why did Emma mention a talent? I thought I didn't have one...

"Emma, please behave."

"Alright Mooom...", she whines before facing the camera, looking a bit uncomfortable. "But... seriously now... congrats big bro! Try not to get the expelled, OK? Do your best at school!"

The me in the screen chuckles at Emma, who is blushing brightly. Yeah, she always had difficulty when trying to compliment me, but then again, we're siblings. We're at each other's throats almost all the time, but not in a malicious way. Our arguments are extremely silly and trivial. But still, I appreciate the fact that Emma is doing this. I appreciate that Hope's Peak Academy granted them this chance to speak to me... because now I know.

I know that I am someone good.

And even though there are some confusing things in this video (The me in the screen, the fact that Emma and Mom are addressing me as if I weren't sitting next to them.), this video just filled me with hope.

Which is why it couldn't last. Monobear's schemes... always end in despair, and I had forgotten that until the me in the screen spoke with a carefree laugh.

"Seriously, Emma. You're telling him to not get expelled knowing how he is?", the Jack on the screen says as he shakes his head laughing, "But seriously, man. Congratulations! Glad to see Hope's Peak Academy will get the honor of the Overland Experience!". All of a sudden, the me on the screen changes his expression to a slightly wistful one.

"But seriously, dude. Don't go and do something stupid, OK? You got to leave SOME fun for your little brother, OK?"

...Huh?

Did he... I mean, did I... no, did the me in the screen say...? There's no...

"Pfft, there's no way you're going to Hope's Peak!", says Emma, completely unaffected, "We don't want the school to burn down."

"What's that supposed to mean?", says the me in the screen with a glare.

"Now now, kids... behave.", says Mom with a completely neutral face, as if she were used to this, "I'm sure Jackson will get to enter Hope's Peak later on."

"But he doesn't have a talent... and he's also a big dumb butt.", says Emma with a pout.

"Can it, squirt.", says the me in the screen, sticking his tongue out to the little girl. "I'm going to work super hard and get into Hope's Peak just like my big bro; just watch!"

I... couldn't digest what I was seeing... what I was hearing...

The me that was in that file... and the me that is on the screen... are the same guy, right? But then... he called me "big brother"â€| does that mean... the me in the screen isn't really me?

I have a little brother too?

...But where does that leave me? I thought... I finally learned everything about me... and now it seems like I have a twin brother. And I still don't have the foggiest idea about my talent either...

But... Monobear's malice didn't end here.

As I was reeling there on my chair with the sudden revelations, the video feed suddenly cut up with static. And when the image came back... my blood chilled.

The living room where they... where my family was sitting... was in complete shambles. Utterly destroyed and torn apart. Long claw marks and blood splatter adorned the walls, windows and furniture laid broken in pieces on the floor, a strange purple haze floated in the air and a fire was burning on the couch my mom had occupied a few moments ago.

The Headmaster's voice soon followed.

"Whatever happened to the lovely mother, the annoying brat Emma and that cheap plot device of a brother? Puhuhu... I wonder... if you ever want to know what happened in this room and what became of them... you just have to leave by killing someone! So... do your best!"

And with that image and message burned on my mind, the video ended, leaving me with unanswered questions and confusion.

And fear.

No, there is no way... they're OK. They're OK, right? My family is safe, right? They're...

They're all I have.

Forget my memories and my past, damn it, they're... they're my family...

They HAVE to be OK... They just have to!

I just cannot lose them...!

I... have to... to get the hell out of here!

With a sense of urgency, I tore my headphones off and I stood up from my chair in a fear-fuelled state. Soon enough, the monitor on the back wall of the A/V Room lit up, giving up some light on the dark room, but I didn't care about that. I had to...

I had to do something...!

I made my way to the exit not knowing what exactly I was going to do, but I didn't want to stay put. But before I could get to the door, Monobear's voice rang from behind me. I turned around and sure enough...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>reunite POV\_HJ [Hiccup\_POV];<strong>

I started to worry about the contents of everyone's movies as soon as I saw Jack stand up and run for the exit with a panicked expression. I tried to stand up and go after him, cursing my klutzy nature all the same as I saw the white haired teen run past me, when that odious voice rang through the room

"Nyahahahaha! Did you bastards enjoy the movies I prepared for you? I toiled away and put my sweat, tears and fur into making them!", said the Headmaster as he looked at us with an enormous grin from the monitor on the back of the A/V Room.

I took this chance to look at everyone's faces and as I expected... sure, their expressions were different, ranging from fear to sadness, but they were all negative.

We all fell for Monobear's trap...

I turned to glare at the bear but...

"What... is the meaning of this?!"

North's booming voice sounded clearly in the room, talking for us, the anger and shock in his voice clear.

"Huh? What do you mean?", said the Headmaster, tilting his head. "It's just a movie, you idiot. Don't tell me you're one of those gullible fools who think that fiction is real! Nyahahahaha!"

"ENOUGH OF YOUR NONSENSE!", demanded the Ultimate Sculptor, and I had to admit I flinched, "You know what I mean! What... Why... what is the reason behind these movies?!"

"There is no way these things are just movies...", said Elsa, barely keeping her ice mask intact.

"Yeah... there were some things on my movie that only I knew about and that I told no one else..." said Rapunzel, looking pale and

struck with fear as she grabbed a long strand of her hair.

"And you said it yourself! These things... you showed them to us to fucking goad us into murder!", said Snotlout, looking incredibly flustered as he pointed a finger at the monochromatic bear, "So does that mean that...?"

"Puhuhuh! I guess the bear's out of the bag!", said the bear, looking completely unaffected. "You're all correct in your suspicions; these movies? They're the next motive!"

Just as I suspected, and as I feared.

Because... because if what he's saying is true... then that means... the contents of the video are true.

...Dad...

"So... you're saying that...?", said Flynn, looking uncharacteristically rattled.

"The contents of those videos are...", continued Tooth, alarmed.

"Yup yup! All real! Genuine article! We don't deal with flimsy motives at Monobear Inc,! What you see is absolutely true, especially my bombastic hips! Hee hee!"

"You're... lyin'! You rotten bag of fleas... you're just bluffin'! There's... there's no way...!", said Merida, with a tone of denial.

"But then again... Monobear never lies about these things.", added Peter, looking the least upset.

"Hee hee, you catch on fast, Pitty!", teased the Headmaster. "I'm telling the truth this time too! So... you better start with the killing, yes? I'm extremely utterly despairfully bored! Hey, come on noooow!"

"Shut up.", I said as I rubbed my temples. We walked into Monobear's trap but that doesn't mean we can't get out. I'm... I'm not going to allow Mutual Killing to happen ever again.

Even if I want out of here as much as everyone else.

We promised Astrid, after all.

So, I'm not giving up.

"Oho?", shouted the Headmaster with fake surprise in his voice, "What's this? Is Hiccy finally rising to his role of protagonist? Hmph, I don't like this... I really hope someone chops that melon head of yours off."

M-melon head?!

"There's not going to be any more killing!", I shouted at the bear with defiance, "Your motives are not going to work! We made a promise.", I said as I gestured at everyone in the room with my arms,

"We will get out of here by our own means, and we won't fall for your stupid tricks anymore... uh, got it?!", I finished lamely.

...Man, that felt, like... very awkward to say. The fact that the room was being enveloped in silence after my speech made me even more uncomfortable. But that was how I really felt. I... didn't want any more deaths. And I would do anything and say anything to prevent that.

Monobear looked... downcast before he spoke again.

"Maaan... I went to all that trouble of cooking up some nice movies for motives and you're saying they're not going to work...? Geez... what a tough crowd... I'm underappreciated in my time..."

"Hiccup is correct. We will not fall for your tricks.", said North, stepping forward. "Your petty motives will not-"

"I see!", interrupted Monobear, as if he had realized something. And as I saw his red eye flash, a familiar sense of dread ran through my spine. "You're saying my motives are too weak... is that right? Weeeeelll..."

"I guess you're right. But since I'm such a thoughtful and generous Headmaster, I won't get mad! In fact, I'm so generous I could get arrested for this! Sooo...! Please, meet me outside of the A/V Room! I have something else for you bastards!"

The monitor turned off, darkening the room once again, and that foreboding sense of dread only intensified. And I wasn't the only one feeling like that. I scanned everyone's faces in the room and everyone looked anxious. And utterly exhausted. But once again, North spoke up.

"Well, no use in standing around like tree in still day. We cannot dilly-dally here, we have to go."

"But... what if it's a trap?", asked Anna, the worry thick on her voice as he grabbed Elsa's hand.

"Do not worry. As long as I live, I will not allow any deaths.", said the Ultimate Sculptor with complete confidence.

"B-besides, we can't stay here forever...", I said with a nervous chuckle. "So... let's just go and get this over with."

But despite me saying that, I was scared. I was scared of whatever Monobear was plotting now. If this was a "weak motive" and it was this bad... then what... could he be planning now instead?

But North was right. We couldn't stay here forever. And as everyone realized that and started to file out of the room hesistantly, I steeled my resolve. I would face whatever Monobear was plotting, I wasn't going to fall for his traps... and I would definitely get out of here with everyone.

I walked up to a lingering Jack by the exit and offered him a weak smile, which he returned after hesitating a bit and I felt relief; that was his first genuine reaction since yesterday. With Toothless and the Ultimate Mystery by my side, we walked outside and braced

ourselves for the worst.

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Jack's POV<span>\*\*

Honestly, I was ashamed of myself.

Monobear's trickery had gotten to me and in my desire to find out whether my family was out or not...

I briefly considered to do anything... and I mean anything to get out.

But thanks to Hic and Nick's words, I came to my senses. They were right. Falling for Monobear's traps and running away... wasn't going to solve anything.

And thought I still really want to know about the fate of my family... there is a correct way to do so. And to be able to do so, we have to face whatever that bastard is going to throw at us and endure it.

It is with this resolve that I step outside with the little Viking next to me.

Yeah... I have to face and endure this. And then after... I'll also do it...

I have to do it. I have to confess.

But first things first.

We all huddled together in front of the A/V Room. However, as soon as we stepped out, I noticed something was off.

The winds were blowing harder than before, almost threatening to knock me down, and the snow was falling harder. And...

"The sky...", I managed to say as I hugged myself for heat. It definitely was colder too. And the sky was dark and stormy, thick clouds billowing with the wind. And yet, even though the sun was blocked out... there was still daylight...

What was going on?

"So, do you guys like it?", said the Headmaster as he popped behind Fishlegs, who yelped with surprise.

"Do we like... what?", asked Ruffnut, rubbing her hands together.

"Isn't this a nice weather we're having?", asked Monobear as he smiled proudly.

"Fuck no. I want to go back to my cottage and get some hot chocolate.", said Snotlout between chattering teeth.

"Unfortunately, you won't be able to get out of here until the weather calms down!", said Monobear as he wagged his finger

disapprovingly. "The cable car can't operate in these conditions!"

"Ugh, who cares about that?", complained Flynn, looking displeased with the cold weather. "Just tell us what you wanted to show us!"

"Puhuhuhu! But...", said the Headmaster ominously, "You're already seeing it!"

Wait... huh?

"What do you-", began Elsa, but she was shushed by Monobear.

"Weeeeell... I just thought you guys needed to have perfect weather for killing, so I cooked up this neat blizzard for you guys! Aren't I thoughtful? Praise me, praise me!", said the Headmaster nonchalantly.

And I had to rethink what he said. Because...

"Made it...?", I said.

"You don't mean...", said Fishlegs, his eyes wide as plates.

"But that is utterly preposterous...", exclaimed Peter, looking incredibly shocked.

"You can't mean you... made the weather, right?", asked Elsa warily.

I thought this was another Monobear parlor trick... that he was just messing around... because really, weather control? That is impossible...

But the Headmaster just smiled. "Yep! That is what I did! Didn't I say so before? We don't do half-assed motives in this camp. When I make motives up, I go all out! Hahahaha!"

"Don't be absurd!", shouted Elsa. "Changing the weather to your whim is..."

"Impossible!", finished Anna.

"No one can do that... the technology doesn't even exist!", argued Rapunzel, "I never read anything about that."

"And yet... I'm telling the truth.", said Monobear flatly. "This is what happens when you diss my motives. Now you have a double serving of a motive! Aren't I generous?"

"This is bullshit!", shouted Snotlout, his face red from the cold.

"A-and, how is this even a motive?! ", said Hic, looking flustered. "Not like I believe your claim of supposed weather control but I don't get how this is a motive for killing stronger than your movies."



"I totally can control the weather, though.", said Monobear gleefully, "That's because I've ascended to Godhood and now I rule this world!"

"As I thought, this beast is lying.", said North, and I had to agree. We had seen unbelievable things on this camp, but weather control? That is...

"I'm not lying! How many times do I have to repeat myself? A fake motive is weak; all my motives and claims about them are the entire truth!", spit the Headmaster angrily as he shook his arms .

'But that... even if what you say is true...', began Fish, looking dubious, "How is a blizzard even a motive for killing?"

"Allow me to explain!", began Monobear, undaunted by the Ultimate Encyclopedia's skepticism. "This will be a special lesson on the super amazing motive for the day: Monobear's Beary Cool Blizzard! Now then, class... what are three necessary things that human beings need to live?"

Well, that came out of nowhere. Was the Headmaster messing around again?

"What... does that even have to do with your motive...?", asked Hic, but the Headmaster glared at him.

"Hey!, I'm the one asking the questions here, Hiccy! So! What are three necessary things that human beings need to live?", asked the Headmaster in the same tone of voice of his previous question.

"Uh... I guess... Air, Food and... Housing?", said Tuff, who was also looking extremely confused. And I understood why. What was Monobear trying to say?

"Since you mentioned two of the things that I wanted to hear, I'll give you a passing grade, Tuffy!", said Monobear with a snicker. "That is right! Human beings such as yourself need food and air and a place to stay to not die!"

"Yeah, we all know that!", said Snot with a roll of his eyes, "But so what? What does that have to do with the blizzard?!"

"You're really dumb, Snotty!", taunted the Headmaster, and Snot simply simmered in his own anger as he glared daggers at the bear. "Think about it... this terrible blizzard is currently making the cable car inoperable... and there's no other way to get out of here..."

"So what you're saying is... we're trapped here in this area until the blizzard ends?", asked Flynn, who was rubbing his chin.

"Yup yup!", confirmed the Headmaster. "And this blizzard will last... I dunno... how about...", his red eye shone as he said the next words, "I guess I'll make it last until you guys kill someone.!"

The gravity of the situation started to dawn on me as soon as I ruminated those words.

Oh no. He couldn't... He wouldn't... would he?

"Ha!", laughed Snot, apparently not understanding the full extent of Monobear's declaration. "You can keep making your stupid blizzard or whatever! We won't kill anyone ever again, so you will be just playing a stupid waiting game!"

"A waiting game that I will win.", said the Headmaster looking extremely serious, his black side facing us. "After all... I am not human. I don't need those things you bastards need to survive. But you do..."

"And guess that? I am not so draconian as to leave you guys without a place to cover yourselves in this area... but, food? Good luck finding something that can't be found here! Puhuhuhu!"

In the silence that soon followed, I realized what Monobear's true trap was. The movies were just the bait. And this... this survival game... was the snare.

"Wait... what do ya mean there's no food here?", asked Aster, looking extremely alarmed.

"I meant exactly what I said. There is no food here, Asty. Zero, cero, zilch, nada. Not even a sad little crumb! Ahahahaha!", said the Headmaster with a gleeful laugh.

"Hey! That's not funny! What are you playing at here?!", shouted Anna, the implications of Monobear's words finally dawning on her.

"This is the second motive I'm giving you guys, simply put!", yelled the Headmaster happily. "In other words, the second motive is this: An endurance test. You guys won't be able to leave this area until you kill someone. There is also no nourishment here. If you guys don't hustle and kill someone, well... let's just say it won't be pretty!"

"You're starving us to death, then?", said Tooth, aghast.

"You monster!", spit Nick, looking outraged.

"Hey, hey! I'm not starving you to death! I'm giving you a choice!", defended the Headmaster. "You either kill or die! I'd kill someone fast if I were you... I mean, what would happen if you waited too long and you got too weak to kill someone due to hunger? Wouldn't that be ever so dreadful... Nyahahaha!"

Monobear's carefree laugh drove his point home. He... was serious. He wasn't going to let us out and he definitely would hold his promise of not giving food to us and letting us out until Mutual Killing occurred.

Once again, we had been driven to the point of despair... but this time, it was worse.

Because this time... if we absolutely wanted to survive... we had to kill.

My thought process turned to Hic. He... he was in danger once

again... after everything that we went through, I thought he would be safe... but now...

Now, we're once again thrown in the midst of a group of people we can't absolutely trust. Because despite wanting to trust them with all I have, I cannot.

Because, as I said, Mutual Killing is a guarantee now.

I need to focus on surviving... and protecting Hic. I cannot lose him. There's so many things that I have to say to him... so many things that I hope I can do with him. I want to survive with him.

And I... will do anything to so...

Hahaha... I guess... if I'm thinking like that... does this mean I'm a bad person? I'm putting Hic's life above the others... and I'm admitting to myself that I would do anything... even kill... to save him. I guess... I never really was a nice person in the end.

But I don't care... all I care about is the Ultimate Lucky Student's survival.

"So, I'll leave that matter to your discretion!", said the Headmaster, looking happy. "Don't disappoint me, OK? I was so beary generous to give you two motives, so I expect a despairful murder and an even more despair-filled Class Trial! Let this Survival Game of thrills, chills and kills begin! Ahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

And with his echoing laughter being carried away in the blizzard's winds, he disappeared as usual, leaving us with a tense atmosphere. Though we were silent, the air felt... charged...

"This... is bad.", said Flynn finally, stating the obvious.

"Bad? Oh, no no no...", said Fish, who looked ready to drop dead, "This is absolutely disastrous!"

"Darn it... we ran into that little bugger's trap... he got us quite well...", said Bunny spitefully.

"Are we really trapped here?", began Punzie, looking scared. "Are we really going to starve to death?"

"We don't have to.", said Pitch, creases on his forehead revealing his worry, "You heard the Headmaster... we won't have to suffer if someone steps up and-"

"Absolutely not.", interrupted Nick, the mere suggestion of what Pitch was saying giving him a sour expression.

"L-let's not jump to conclusions, everyone...!", said Hic, gesturing agitatedly. "We're... not even sure if what Monobear was saying about there being no exit was the truth...!"

"I agree with Hiccup.", said Nick, looking pleased that someone was being optimistic. "Let us make no hasty decisions. We shall find a way out and thwart the evil beast's plan!"

"That's an awfully optimistic point of view...", said Elsa as she looked quizzically at the mountain of a man.

"But its our only option.", interjected Hic, looking serious and very... mature for his tiny stature. "We cannot lose hope here... we need to believe that there is another option besides killing to survive... so... let's give it our best, yeah?"

Hic's earnest optimism motivated me. He was right. I, too, was jumping to conclusions, but he was absolutely right. Even though I said that I would do anything to protect the little Viking... I'd rather not hurt anyone, if at all. So believing that there was another way was our only option.

"For now...", I began, catching everyone's attention. I could feel the distrust in the other's gazes but I held my ground. Hic believed in me (whoever I was... thanks to Monobear's plotting, I don't even know anymore) and that's all I needed, "We should probably look for a place to stay. Monobear... did say that, right?"

"Jack is right.", said Tooth. "Before we start our search for a way out... we need a base of sorts. Let's look for that place, yes?"

"That is sound plan, Tooth.", said Nick with a smile and I smirked when I saw the Ultimate Dentist blush at the compliment. "Alright everyone. Let us forget about that beast's nonsense and look for refuge!"

And with that declaration, the Ultimate Sculptor marched away, the rest of us following him shortly after.

I trailed behind with Hic, who was exchanging looks with Toothless. He was hugging his dragon friend, the worry clear on his face. Hesitating a bit before reaching out to him, I put a hand on his shoulder and relished at the electric feel I got at the touch and the surprise on his expression.

"Hey... it's going to be alright...", I said in a reassuring tone. "So, don't worry, OK, Hic? After all, you're the one who said there was another way."

He gave an embarrassed smile before talking, his gaze on his feet. "I really should practice what I preach huh... man, I must have sounded so lame..."

I crossed my arms and made a thoughtful look. "I'd give you a 7/10 for that speech, being honest here, Hic."

The Ultimate Lucky Student rolled his eyes and relief flooded me. I... managed to break him out of his funk. And now we we're back to our routine. "As if you would've done better...", said Hic, looking at me with narrowed eyes.

"Sure I would've done better. After all, my good looks probably would have motivated everyone by themselves." I said with a big grin. At that, Hic snorted and I couldn't help but to join him. His sincere laughs were infectious... and he looked so cute when he laughed like that...

"C'mon, Narcisus..!", said Hic after catching his breath, "We better join the others before they wonder if you walked off a cliff."

I made a fake hurt noise as the little Viking started to walk away, the Night Fury besides us looking at our exchange with a... smug expression...? I instantly caught up with Hic and jogged in front of him, a big smile on my face as the Viking looked at me with an arched eyebrow.

"Well, YOU better hurry up before you end up eating my dust!", and with that, I broke out in a run, leaving a bewildered Hic behind.

"There is no dust here! There's only snow, you knucklehead!", was all I heard from behind me and I simply laughed in response.

It was hard to believe that we were in Monobear's plot this time since we we're acting so carefree... No, it probably is because of Monobear's traps that we're acting so carefree... this is our way of coping.

But I don't mind. I... enjoy this. I enjoy being with Hic. And I also have to say... something important to him.

But we have to focus on getting out of Monobear's trap first.

And we will definitely do so. And its with that motivation that we make our way towards the Grand Square, where everyone is convening to.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Whoa, that was some wonky format back on the movies segment wasn't it? <strong>

\*\*Don't worry, all that it meant was that Jack and Hiccup watching those movies happened at the same time. There is nothing else to the "bifurcate" and "reunite" lines, I swear!\*\*

\*\*In any case, I do apologize for the wait. Thanks for bearing with me and I hope that I'm still delivering with my chapters. Unfortunatley, I can't promise I will be able to update that fast anymore, but I'll do my best.\*\*

\*\*See ya next time!\*\*

## 20. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days F

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days F\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Tah-dah! A chapter so soon? Well, not as quick as the other chapters, but I updated faster compared to the other chapters! Aren't I such a mindful author?<strong>

\*\*Hee hee, but oh man. I'm not comfortable with this chapter. I'll explain why later. For now, try to enjoy, my friends!\*\*

**\*\*Also, I don't like doing this in the author notes, but thank you beary much, guys! Really, I appreciate all of you readers and your reviews, even those that don't have accounts! Your words keep me going and I sincerely am sorry that I haven't replied to your reviews. But rest assure that I read them! And I enjoy seeing that at least over 1k people think my fic is worth reading and that at least over 20 find my story fascinating enough to follow!\*\***

**\*\*Sappy sappy but beary happy thanks! That's all I wanted to say! Thank you!\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

"Man, those were some fucked up videos, huh, Hic?"

We we're walking towards the Grand Square in comfortable quietness after the ruckus this adorabl- ANNOYING jerk caused back there (seriously, I had to sic Toothless on this white haired idiot to make him stop running circles around me), but his sudden comment just now... well, to say that I was shocked and a bit uncomfortable was an understatement.

Remembering that video and its content when I just had managed to forget them was not on my top of my list. But as I saw Jack's face, I realized that he didn't like remembering the contents of his video either. He's probably still bothered by what he saw and that's why he wants to talk about it... Yeah, Jack is definitely the kind of guy that would want to let out all his worries on someone...

"Yeah, that bear really went all out to make us miserable, huh..."

Truth be told, even though I didn't want to remember what I saw on those videos... there were indeed some troubling things on it that I wanted to discuss with someone. But was it really OK to want to do that? I mean, the things we saw on those videos were probably too personal for some of us... so I just assumed most of us were not going to share. In my case, I didn't mind sharing but yeah... some of us might not want to.

Jack just nodded his head and gulped loudly, a nervous smile on his face. "Yeah... its like he's got a degree on torturing kids or something messed up like that." A nervous laugh follows that comment before his smile falls, the whitette turning unusually quiet. "So... Hic...", he begins, his voice barely audible on the raging storm that is actually making me shiver and curse my summer attire, "â€| Do you really think... what we saw on that screen... was what those videos showed the real deal...?"

That was the million dollar question. I didn't want to believe those videos. Somehow, accepting that the videos were real made me feel like I've given up to Monobear. But despite me wanting to deny with all my heart everything I saw there... "You know that bear, Jack. When he's trying to make us suffer... he doesn't sugar coat it... he just straight up tells you things how it is..."

Jack grimaced at my answer before saying in a barely audible whisper, "Yeah... thought so..."

"Why did you ask me this anyway? Did you... see something bad on your video, Jack?", I asked mentally slapping myself for asking such a dumb question. Of course the videos had something bad! Really, Haddock!

The Ultimate Mystery hesitates and doesn't answer and once again I assume that he is not willing to share. And I understand why he would do that (no I wasn't bothered the tiniest bit that Jack didn't trust me shut up) but then Jack opened his mouth to speak. With great difficulty, he told me.

"Hic... I have a younger brother."

I think it took me like 2 minutes of blank staring at the Ultimate Mystery's face before his declaration made sense to me. Of course, my answer to such mind-blowing revelation as an eloquently put:

"Huh?"

The white haired teen simply smiled sheepishly, his shoulders shrugging while he faced me and kept talking to me: "Yeah... my video... had my family on it... and I was there! Or rather... I thought I was..."

Jack paused to gather his thoughts, and I honestly also needed the pause. Jack saw himself in that video? That's odd... "That's... very weird, Jack. In my video... I wasn't on it. In my video, my Dad and... my Mom and a family friend were there... but I didn't see myself on it."

Jack hums at my words before smiling embarrassedly. "Yeah, but the thing is... you remember that file that Pitch showed us last time? The one that said that I... was part of the Reserve Course?" I nodded. Of course I couldn't forget that. It's the reason everyone is being more cold towards him. "Well, the thing is... that Jack is not me...", he continues, much to my confusion. "The Jack on the file... and the Jack I saw on the video are actually my little brother Jackson."

A lot of thoughts run through my friend. I'm unsure... about how to react to this... Um...

"Whoa, Jack... that's like... Wow!", I manage to stutter in the least elegant way possible. Toothless is at a loss too. "I... don't know... what to say, hahahaha...! I've been laughing for too long..."

Jack laughs at my awkwardness but remains silent and clearly uncomfortable. And with that we fall silent, not knowing what to say as we stand there in the middle of this blizzard.

This was a lot to take on. So Jack has a younger brother that looks almost exactly like him? And his little brother is the one from the Reserve Course? Then... what does that mean for Jack? Is he really an Ultimate? Or who is he, really?

...No, I've decided to not doubt Jack. Despite this revelation... the guy I've met until today is genuine. He's never been fake and despite his carefree attitude and humor, he's trustworthy enough. So what if

Jack has a sibling? That changes nothing about him... he's still the same guy. He's still my friend... and my impossible crush.

"H-hey... Hic? What do you think...?"

The hesitant tone in his question makes me look at him. He's actually looking scared... his blue eyes displaying nervousness and fear. Does he really... value my opinion that much? Well, I shouldn't leave him hanging. I'm just scaring him witless, I bet! With a smile, I close up the distance and bump into him playfully.

"What? That changes nothing, you goof. You're still the same dork to me."

"This is serious, Hiccup!", he yells, actually startling me. He realizes he raised his voice, looking shocked before looking away, biting his lower lip. Augh... I guess this is affecting him more than I thought...

"I'm... sorry, Jack... I..." I mumble out, "But I... really mean it! I mean, so what if you have a brother? That changed nothing about you. To me... you're still Jack. I won't treat you any different, honest!" At that, the Ultimate Mystery looks at me with a sad expression, grimacing.

"I'm sorry Hic... I... shouldn't have yelled... it's just...!", the whitette pulls his hair in frustration. "I thought...! I thought I had learned something about me, even if I didn't like that truth! But now...! I'm back to knowing next to nothing about myself!"

"Just... just who am I, Hic? That's... all I want to know.", he says, sounding defeated. "I just want to know the truth... about myself, about my family... is that too much to ask?"

I guess Monobear really did a number on all of us, but his video must have hit him the hardest. Being taunted by clues left by the Headmaster, only to find out we we're mistaken... yeah, that feeling is probably hurting Jack a lot. And I wish I could say "I understand!", but I really can't. I don't know what Jack is going through.

But that doesn't mean I'll leave him alone. Even if I can't understand his pain... I will be by his side.

...I really am a masochist, aren't I? Let it be known that Hiccup Haddock has a thing for being with unrequited love interests because he can't leave them alone at all.

"Don't... don't worry Jack." I begin my pathetic attempts at reassurance, "You'll... we'll find out about your memories... I promise. Yeah..." What am I doing? Why am I making promises I don't know I'll be able to keep? But seeing Jack look so sad... I just can't leave him like this... "We'll help you... Toothless and I! So...!", I place my hand on his shoulder and he looks at me expectantly and I can't help but to get lost in his eyes and- Haddock, no, that's too cheesy! Focus! Don't look at the slight freckles on his cheeks or the bags under his eyes or his lips or- DANG IT!

"So, don't worry!" I say. Literally the first thing that pops in my



mind. "Everything will be fine, Jack. We'll find out about your past and escape, OK?"

The whittete looks at me with... awe? I'm not sure. But soon after, he breaks into a slight smile, before proceeding to hug me. I delight in the moment, taking every aspect of his body as much as the fabric of his clothes let me and I let the warmth of his hug involve me. I return the hug, trying to extend this feeling... because this... is probably how far I'm going to get. But I'm glad that he seems to be relieved.

"Thanks, Hic. You always know what to say."

He speaks into my ear and I try not to shiver at the breath that graces my ear.

"That's... basically all I'm good for, haha... so yeah, you're welcome Jack." I answer, stuttering, completely overwhelmed by the contact. Jack chuckles at my comment and he squeezes me a bit more before letting me go.

"Will you ever not be hard on yourself?", he says with a smirk as he steps back and puts his hands on the front pocket of his hoodie, looking slightly flushed.

"I guess it'll happen when you stop being such a dork."

"You're one to talk, Hic. I'm not the one with the dragon obsession 24/7."

"Are you saying there's something wrong about dragons, Jack?", I say with a smirk, pointing at Toothless, who was looking at us with a bored expression. "Because you can always tell this Night Fury all about the things you don't like about him."

Jack starts to sulk as he eyes the black dragon. "Someday you won't be able to use Toothless as an excuse."

I let out a small laugh. "Yeah, dream on. Now come on, you big baby boo." I say as I walk from a grumpy Jack, "We need to meet with the others."

Jack simply answers with a "yeah yeah" before falling into a walk with me, us bickering and messing around as we make our way towards the Grand Square. I still can't believe we're able to talk like this so openly about our issues and yet act all carefree like this. As if we were friends before.

Maybe we were during our School Lives? Did Monobear take those memories, then? I guess that would make sense.

Well, I guess we'll find out soon. But I am getting ahead of myself. First we have to get out of here. And for that, we need to survive Monobear's trap. And for THAT, we need to start by what we can do right now, and that is finding a shelter from this storm.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

When Hic and I got to the Grand Square, we found no one there. Well, no one except for that redheaded girl and friend of us, Mer. She was looking at us with a confident smirk, her arms crossed, and I immediately feared she had gotten the wrong idea.

Thankfully, she made no comment in front of Hic, instead chastising us for being late. She hurried us onward towards the East exit of the square towards. if I remember correctly, the motel Anna and Elsa investigated.

Hic and I made to go there, but I suddenly found myself being pulled by the neck of my hoodie, Hic walking forwards without noticing me struggling against my assailant.

Of course, I stopped struggling once I saw who was pulling me back.

"So, how did it go, Jack?", asked Merida, a wide smile on her freckled face.

I groaned and rubbed my forehead with my hand. "Augh... Mer! I haven't told him yet! God, can't you be a little patient or something? I thought for sure someone was going to kill me right now!"

Instantly, Merida's face change to one bearing a scowl. "Well, I'm goin' to kill ya if you don't tell 'im you knucklehead!", and after saying that, she let me go.

Taking a breath, I turned to her and spoke in shushed tones. "I-it's... not that simple, OK?! I... I need more time, OK?"

"What ya need is someone to kick your butt into gear, Jack!", said Merida with a huff. "Seriously, just tell 'im now! Before somethin' happens!"

"In case you didn't notice, something HAS already happened.", I shot back, exasperated. How could she not get it?! "This just isn't the time to burden Hic with my lame prospects of love. We're in danger, Mer! Escaping from this should be our priority."

The Ultimate Archer merely shakes her head in disapproval. "You should tell 'im now, you idiot! What... what if somethin' happens, huh?! By then will it be too late and-"

"Shut up!", I scream, louder than intended. "Nothing... nothing will happen!", I say, breathing heavily, worst case scenarios playing in my head. "I'll... I'll make sure we'll get out of here alive and... and then I will tell him!", I finish firmly. There was no way I was going to let something happen to Hic... and frankly, the idea of him getting hurt or worse made me sick... and I didn't want to entertain the idea any further. So with a huff, I turned around and ran up to catch with Hic, leaving behind a Merida who was shaking her head with disappointment.

When I caught up with the little Viking and the Night Fury, we had already arrived in front of the hotel.

If there was a word for that could describe the hotel... it would be "fishy". Or "shady". Or if I could use more than one word, it would

be "Big Pile of Shit".

Because the structure of this building was... something no sane architect would approve! The first floor was OK, a simple circular exterior with glass doors revealing a well furnished lobby with aquamarine carpets and blue velvet sofas and a reception desk made out of mahogany. Some stairs could be seen next to the reception desk, and a sign by the entrance pointed to the right, the words reading "Deluxe Rooms". All in all, it was a simple lobby, a simple first floor.

However, things got weird on the second floor. We couldn't see its inside like the first floor, but I kinda didn't want to see it. Because unlike the first floor, the second floor's exterior was shaped like an scalene triangle. Yeah, you heard me right. Somehow, Monobear had made it possible to build something like this. To make things even more outrageous, he had given the exterior of the second floor a paint job, shocking pink coating the walls. All in all, it was an outstanding thing, in a bad way. And things just got progressively worse.

The next floor was the smallest one, apparently, and it was built precariously on the edge of the second floor. On top of that, the floor was shaped like a vertical rectangle and was painted green. It also lacked windows and for some reason it had another skull painted on it, just like the Final Dead Room's door. On top of this floor was the final one, and this was shaped in a more regular shape; a square, but since it was built on top of the rather small third floor, it looked as if it could fall off any minute now. This floor's exterior was painted blue and if this thing hadn't been built by the Headmaster, I would probably have liked the choice of color. A neon sign rested on the top of the floor, reading "Virtue's Last Reward".

All in all, one could say the 'theme' behind this building's structure was "Looks as if it were made with building blocks for kids". It was absolutely ridiculous. And we were apparently going to stay here.

"Somehow... I think I'd rather sleep outside...", said Hic as he took in the crazy layout of the building.

"I agree with that." And at that moment, I felt as if that were the most honest thing I've ever said.

"Aw, come on ya big babies!", said Mer suddenly, walking up to us. I tensed when I saw her but relaxed upon seeing her face. Somehow, I could tell she wasn't going to bring what we talked about earlier. "We hafta do it, anyway, so let's get goin'!" and with bold steps, she walked past us and into the bear's den.

After exchanging some reluctant looks, Hic and I gathered our courage and with deliberately slow steps, we walked into the lobby. Surprisingly, Toothless was able to enter through the doors with ease. I was sure he was going to be stuck, but then again, he hasn't really struggled with any of the doors or facilities on this camp.

As soon as we stepped in, Tooth called to us over from where the sign that said "Deluxe Rooms" was pointing at. Merida was nowhere to be

seen, so she probably was also directed by Tooth to come with her. With a sheepish smile, the Ultimate Dentist led us down a hall lined with photo frames displaying pictures of, you guessed right, our beloved Headmaster. There was one, however, that was different; a rather small and poorly maintained wooden frame. It stood out from the others because of its size and to my surprise, it didn't have a picture of Monobear. Instead, it had a picture of a serene-looking man with no hair and a pale complexion clad in a blue tuxedo and a black tie. I didn't have time to examine it, however, as I had to keep up with Hic and Tooth. So with my curiosity unsatisfied, I left the frame behind.

\* \* \*

><p>We came into a square room and there we found everyone gathered in the center of it. Once again, the apparently wacky structure of this building was made apparent. It was a normal enough room, truth be told, but the wallpaper had a lolipop motif and it was bright red. This place was... going to hurt my eyes. On the left and right walls of the room I could see doors, two on each side. I guess those are the guest rooms?<p>

"So, this is the hotel you girls we're talking about?", asked Flynn as he made a face and he took in our surroundings.

"Yes, but...", began Elsa, looking equally displeased, "I didn't think the interior would be this horrendous."

"Yeah, I agree with you, sis.", said Anna, looking down. "Good thing we didn't explore this place fully."

"Hey!", shouted Monobear as he appeared suddenly behind Snot, who shouted in a totally unmanly way, "Don't go and insult my taste of dÃ©cor! I'm proud of this place, ya know!"

"Your completely lacking in taste, but then again, that much was already obvious.", said Pitch looking extremely done with the Headmaster, the venom obvious in his tone of voice.

"Geez, so rude! And after I'm offering you guys to stay in this place for free...", said the bear, a sad, fake tone of hurt coating his words.

"So... we're really staying here?", said Punzie, looking extremely disappointed. Yeah, I had to agree with her.

"The way you say that... I don't like it.", said Monobear, looking angry now. "But oh well! Kids these days are total ingrates so I guess I expected this response!", continued the Headmaster, shifting to a carefree expression as he showed his white side to us, an arm on the back of his head. "Yep yep! Welcome to the hotel of your dreams! Please enjoy your stay that I hope will be fleeting! You definitely don't want to stay cooped up here for too long without any food, after all!"

"So you're really starving us here...", said Bunny, his expression darkening.

"Well... you don't HAVE to starve, you know? You can easily get out of here if you off someone from your group! But succumbing to the

urge to kill when it hasn't even been a day...", said Monobear as he put his paws over his mouth to suppress a giggle, "Puhuhuhu! You guys really don't have any sense of will! So easily broken!"

On an instant, Nick was on the bear. "We will not kill any-", but before he could finish his sentence, Monobear silenced him with his raised paw. "Yeah yeah 'we will not succumb to despair' spiel. Whatever. I don't care. That's not why I came here."

Leaving a stunned Nick, the Headmaster turned to face the rest of our group. "I came to tell you guys aaaall about this hotel! As I've already told you, this place is here for you to stay! We wouldn't you guys to die so pathetically on the snow, right? So please feel free to choose a room!"

"I prepared 16 rooms, 4 on each floor. However, due to my limited budget... I kinda had to cut corners on some of them! Not sorry!", the bear snickered, and I groaned internally. This is going to be good.

"Wait, 16?", said Hic, looking at the bear with narrowed eyes. "There's only 14 of us..."

"Well, I originally made this place for 16, but you barbaric teenagers had to go and kill each other~", taunted the Headmaster brightly. The anger on the little Viking's face was obvious but he made a good job on restraining himself, simply biting his lip with frustration instead.

"Aaanyways! The number of rooms doesn't matter! What matters is the rooms themselves!", said Monobear, completely undaunted by Hic's anger. "Allow me to explain!"

"On the first floor we have the Super Deluxe Rooms!", said the Headmaster as he pointed at one of the doors in this floor. "These are the best rooms in the hotel, with superior insulation, beds and soundproof walls! These are definitely the best of the best I could buy!"

"Next, we have some regular Deluxe Rooms on the second floor. These are pretty much the same as the Super Deluxe Rooms, just slightly cheaper. By the way, you can reach the second floor by taking the stairs next to the Reception Desk on the lobby! There are no elevators here, though. Get healthy by using the stairs, I say!" And as he said that, I could swear Monobear was smiling smugly.

"On the third floor, you'll find some Normal Rooms. They aren't bad, but they aren't that remarkable either. Don't worry, you won't feel a draft when you sleep and the beds aren't that stiff so at the very least you'll sleep nice and tight! Just pray that your neighbors aren't loud snoring people, or else you'll find yourself wide awake all night!"

"And finally, on the top floor we have the Crummy Rooms! Man, those rooms do suck! No insulation, walls thin as Hiccy and you only have a sleeping bag to rest! Also, since the last floor is on top of the third floor, the rooms may sway a bit when the wind gets strong... also I guess the drafts will be more noticeable there? Also, having to climb all those stairs just to get to bed... man, those are SOME crummy rooms, don't you think? Ahahahaha!", And I could tell from the

tone of his laugh... this was deliberate. There was no way Monobear had run out of "funds". He did this to make us suffer, I'm sure.

"As for who gets to use which room..." said the Headmaster, pausing with a smile on his snout, "You can decide that by yourself, right? You're almost adults, after all. So please, be civil and don't kill yourselves over this... but then again, if you do, I don't object at all! Puhuhuhuhuhuhu!". And with his spiel done, the Headmaster left us with his lingering giggle.

"Well, he continues to be as charming as ever.", said Flynn, looking at the spot where the Headmaster was standing in just some seconds ago with a glare. "So, what are we going to do?", he asked, putting his hands on his pockets as he looked at us with an expectant expression.

"We are having emergency meeting. Now." said Nick almost instantly, and everyone looked the towering teen with confusion.

"A meeting, now?", asked Hic.

"But we wanted to check out the rooms!", whined Ruff, Tuff nodding at her comment.

"No.", said Nick firmly. "We have lots to discuss and we need to settle on plan of action. Let us go to the lobby." and with that order, the Ultimate Sculptor walked away down the hall, back to the lobby, leaving us there, looking dumbstruck.

"Wow, pushy much?", said Merida with a scowl, and I had to agree. Why was Nick being so pushy with ordering us around all of a sudden? Was he that worried about us? Or... No, I shouldn't doubt him. And besides, even if I want to disobey and look around, if I do so, I'll only make him distrust me more. So with a resigned sigh, I made to follow him, wondering what the heck was so important to discuss that made Nick so worried?

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

We somehow managed to squeeze all 14 of us and a dragon in the lobby. I made the smart choice of not sitting on the couches, seeing how the ones that did were sitting uncomfortably close, judging by their squirming. Instead, I opted to stand near North, who was waiting for everyone to quiet down.

Once everyone quieted down (We had to sic Toothless on the Twins or else we would have waited for a rather loooong time), North cleared his throat, a grave look etched on his face as we all turned to face him, his beefy arms crossed in front of his chest.

"We are here to discuss our present situation.", began North as he scanned the room and everyone's faces. "As you all know, we are in a dire trap".

"No shit!", yelled Snotlout, and I had to roll my eyes.

"Which is why", continued North, glaring at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, "We must decide on plan of action. It goes without saying

that there will not be killing." and as he said that his gaze lingered on Snotlout, who looked uncomfortable. "So we all agree on looking for way out instead of falling for Monobear's trap, yes?"

"When you mean Monobear's trap, do you mean those videos?", asked Punzie.

"Man, what's with those videos, though?", said Flynn as he scratched his head. "Like, how did he even get all that footage? Ya think they're real?"

"I'm pretty sure they are.", said Fishlegs, as he bit his thumb. "Video editing can only get you so far."

"So...", Tooth's small, fear-filled voice stood out in the room, "...What we saw on those videos... those were the real deal...?"

"What did ya see in it, Tooth?", asked Aster, looking at the Ultimate Dentist with concern. Tooth took in a shaky breath as she closed her eyes, steeling herself before speaking.

"I saw my... my family... and my house, the dentist's office we own... completely destroyed."

The silence that followed was understandable. It wasn't an uncomfortable silence... more like a silence born out from understanding. Because we actually knew how Tooth felt.

"So you too?", asked Anna, her complexion paling a little. "I mean, the whole 'house being ruined' part, at least?". The Ultimate Dentist nodded silently, her face filling with worry as everyone in the room, myself included, answered Anna's question with mumbled 'yes'es.

"So this is how Monobear is plotting to force our hand... I see.", said Peter, deep in thought as he tried to get away from Fishleg's large frame which occupied most of the couch he was sitting on.

"And on top of that, he put a time limit based on how much we can endure without food... yes, the Headmaster was certainly tricky this time around.", added Elsa, her arms crossed.

"Regardless, the only thing we can do is search for a way to escape.", said North with a huff.

Of course we all wanted to believe there was another way to escape. Killing someone? No, I wouldn't do that and much less when I'm being forced to. So we simply had to do our best and search. We had to beat the Headmaster at his own game.

"I still don't get why he's doing this...", said Snotlout, his brow furrowed with concentration.

"Yeah...", I began, feeling uncomfortable as everyone's stares focused on me. "There's still a lot of things we don't know... Like for example;" I said as I started to count things off with my hand. "Who Monobear really is."

"His identity is still a mystery.", continued Elsa. "Whoever is

behind him is surely our captor."

"Hey, Hic, didn't you say dragons were a secret of Berk?", asked Jack as he scratched his head. "So... why was Monobear able to use one... b-back at the Class Trial?"

"I don't know...", I answered truthfully. Just... who was the person behind Monobear, the one with enough power and resources to trap us here, and control dragons. "We also don't know why he took our memories, too."

"Yeah, I don't get it...", added Merida. "I mean, what's the point of doin' that if he was tellin' us anyway? What's his plan?"

"I still have a hard time believing this memory-erasing stuff...", said Aster.

"But its true.", said Jack and he looked like he immediately regretted speaking as everyone looked at him. "I'm proof of that... I... My memory's been returning somewhat but I... still have blanks in my mind."

"There is also something we don't know." said Peter suddenly, glaring daggers at Jack. "The identity of the supposed traitor that works for Monobear that is within or midst." A smile crept on the Ultimate Fear Experts face. "Although I'm sure most of us suspect someone... isn't that right, pitiful Reserve Course Student."

Jack's expression fell at that comment and I honestly don't know where all this anger came from, but I... I couldn't let him say that to Jack. "Peter, you shouldn't talk like that to... to him! OK? He's not a Reserve Course student and even if he were, he doesn't deserve being treated like, dirt, OK?! OK."

The Ultimate Fear Expert looked shocked and slightly disappointed. "Why are you siding with the Reserve Course failure..." he said to himself, barely audible.

"A-anyways! Jack is not the traitor." I said as I tried to step away from that topic. I didn't want to reveal anything that Jack didn't want to share. And right now, the Ultimate Mystery looked like he didn't want to talk. But I took his appreciative smile as a sign that I had done good, so I carried on. "We also don't even know if they're even real or another trick from Monobear."

"Speaking of tricks...", said Flynn, eyeing Jack suspiciously, "How did Monobear get these videos?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Rider?", asked Elsa.

"Well, in the videos, we were told these were made by the school, right? Something about how its customary for Hope's Peak Academy to hold these recording sessions so that families can keep in touch with their daughters and sons, right?"

"So, its obvious that Monobear added the last bits to the original videos, but the question is... how did he get them in the first place?", said Flynn, looking puzzled.

"He most likely got them from the school directly...", I mumbled. But



how? Did he just break in? Or...

"Do you think Monobear is actually someone from Hope's Peak Academy?" asked Tooth. "That would explain how he got them so easily..."

Fishlegs shook his head. "No way! I mean...! There's no way Hope's Peak Academy would do something so vile! They also suffered at Monobear's hands, remember? So him and the school working together is... incredibly far-fetched!"

So in the end, we didn't get answers to any of the mysteries surrounding us, which was normal but not less frustrating. Somehow, having all these unanswered questions ruined my mood. It filled me with this need of trying to find the answers... the truth. And really, what was stopping me from doing so? Maybe... just maybe... while we try to find a way to escape... should I investigate this? But from where should I start?

No... I guess I should escape first. The longer we stay cooped up here, the longer I risk losing someone important. I briefly take a look at Jack when I think he isn't looking but I instead end up looking at the whiteette's striking blue eyes, who upon realizing I caught him looking, averts his eyes quickly. What the...?

Nevertheless... yeah, escaping should be my priority. I don't want to lose anyone to despair... especially Jack.

"Hey, don't you find this odd?"

Ruffnut's sudden question perplexed me. There... were a lot of things I found odd and we just finished discussing them! Was she not paying attention?

Before I could comment though, I looked at her and saw that she was holding her ElectroID in front of her face, looking at it with narrowed eyes. Her brother was doing the same. "You think it's broken? That would suck... we didn't even get to use the nitrogen on it." Said Tuff, looking disappointed.

"What are you guys talking about?", I said, clearly confused.

Ruffnut looked at me after her taking one last glance at her ID. "Well, I just think it's weird that its 10 PM but there hasn't been any Night Time Announcements."

At hearing that, I instantly took out my ElectroID and fumbled with it, only to find that she was telling the truth. My ElectroID's clock was indeed showing it was past 10PM and yet... no Night Announcement had been made.

As everyone went to check their IDs to confirm this fact, Jack tapped my shoulder. When I turned around, the white haired teen was pointing towards the glass doors of the lobby. As I looked outside, I couldn't help but think that this was odd. Because... there was still daylight on the outside. There was a storm, sure, but... it still looked as bright as when we arrived at the hotel, no, before we even arrived in this area.

And yet the clock was undoubtedly showing "10 PM".

What was happening? Maybe Monobear...?

"I know what you're thinking Hiccy..."

"Odin's Ghost!"

I want to deny the fact that I screeched when Monobear popped up behind me, but there are witnesses who can declare otherwise, so I'll refrain from lying. As I turned around, I saw the Headmaster with a dangerous expression.

"You're probably thinking something along the lines of 'That good for nothing Monobear probably fell asleep on the job and forgot to play the Night Announcement'â€¦ But you're wrong! The ElectroID is functional and it really is past 10 PM!"

"So then why-", I began but Monobear interrupted me again.

"Well... as a teacher, I'm obliged to help you guys mature and stuff, right?", said the bear, a carefree smile coating his tirade, "So, I decided that while we're here, I'm going to suspend the Monobear Announcements! This way, you'll have to learn that in the real world, there are no gorgeous good looking bears that tell you when to wake up and when to go to bed! Aren't I such a great teacher for giving you this valuable life lesson?"

And once he finished what he had to say, along with stroking his ego even more, the Headmaster disappeared. The slight headache I had rose with intensity after Monobear's "lesson". How does he even come up with the stuff he talks about?!

"Why couldn't he just say he wasn't going to make more Monobear Announcements? Seriously, what a pain in the ass...", whined Snotlout, and I agreed with him silently.

"In any case", said North, "It is too late now for escape route searching. We shall retire for the night and start working tomorrow. It may be still light outside, but it is probably as cold as if it were night and it would be bad if we got lost in the blizzard in that cold."

Toothless sneezing after North's comment sealed the deal. Everyone agreed to rest in the hotel room and we decided in a civilized manner the room accommodations.

Yeah right, I WISH that happened.

Well, the girls DID decide their room arrangements in a civilized manner. Merida said that she didn't mind sleeping in a Crummy Room, saying she "was used to sleep in the wild." so she took residence in one of them. Rapunzel was going to stay in a Crummy Room too, in order to give Merida some company, but the redhead made her take a Normal Room. Elsa and Anna quickly jumped on the available Super Deluxe Rooms and Tooth went and made herself at home on a Normal Room.

As for us boys...

Well, honestly, things would have gone better if Snotlout hadn't started being a jerk. He had decided to take a Super Deluxe Room, but Jack had to go and say that "a person like him deserved a Crummy Room at best.". The situation got out of control when the Twins and Flynn added their two cents, disparaging comments about Snotlout's personal hygiene being flung around.

The resulting wrestling match between the four of them (that Toothless stopped since no one, not even myself, wanted to get caught between them) left us with a Jack with a bruised right eye, a Snotlout with a bloody nose, a Flynn with a puffy eye and, surprisingly, an unscathed pair of Twins.

"OK, look.", I said, fed up with their childish behavior. "We could have decided which rooms to take without having to go through this, you know..."

" 's all that white haired freak's fault!", started Snotlout, pushing Jack away. Before the Ultimate Mystery jumped him again, I spoke. "Look, OK, I'll take a Crummy Room, OK?"

Instantly, Jack objected. "No way, Hic, take a Normal Room!"

"I'm taking a Crummy Room if that means you guys will stop fighting!", I shot back. I really wasn't in the mood for debating. Monobear's trap, the mysteries surrounding us... our current situation... adding a group of quarreling teens to my list of woes was making wonders to my mood. Not.

"I'll take one as well...", said Fishlegs., with a tone of resignation "It's not like any of you are going to pick one either, so I'll take it for myself..."

"We'll take the last Crummy Room, then.", said Ruffnut. I was going to suggest the Twins to take separate rooms since we had leftovers, but they didn't seem comfortable with separating ever, so I kept silent.

"Y-you totally picked a Crummy Room on purpose to mess with me!", whined Fishlegs.

"Did not.", said Ruff, a smile on her face showing that she did, in fact did so.

Snotlout insisted on taking a Super Deluxe Room, so we decided to give it to him just so he could shut up about it. As soon as we said yes to him, he walked away from the group and down the hallway where the Super Deluxe Rooms were.

"If you don't mind, I'll take a Deluxe Room.", said Peter, and for some reason, I wasn't surprised. He did look like the kind of guy who would go for the nice things in life. But why he didn't pick a Super Deluxe one?

"Super Deluxe and Deluxe... nah, that's too much. I'll take a Normal Room.", said Flynn as he cracked his back and winced, apparently the scuffle between them leaving some unseen wounds.

"Then I guess I'll take the other Normal Room...", said Jack, staring

at me with a glare. I had a feeling he hadn't forgiven me for taking a Crummy Room and giving Snotlout a Super Deluxe one, but oh well... I guess I'll apologize later...

North settled for a Deluxe Room, mumbling that "he hoped the Deluxe Rooms had big enough beds for him." as he left and took the stairs.

Surprisingly, Aster took the remaining Super Deluxe Room. I didn't judge him for that, though. Surely, as the Ultimate Survivalist, he had slept in far worse places and I guess he deserved a break.

And so, with our sleeping arrangements decided, we all dispersed for the night. We all said our goodbyes as we separated on each floor, all of us one by one entering our rooms. Jack hesitated a bit at his door, but I reassured him that I would be fine. I... wish he would stop doing that... it only makes it harder for me to get over this stupid crush. After convincing him that I would be OK, we said good bye and the Ultimate Mystery entered his room, still looking at me with a worried expression as he closed the door.

Yep, totally not getting over him any time soon. Fantastic.

With that grim realization, I continued climbing the stairs, Toothless walking next to me looking unsettled by the ridiculous amount of stairs.

\* \* \*

><p>I had to admit I had underestimated climbing the stairs to the top floor. By the time Toothless and I got to the top, I was a little winded. And it wasn't until I had climbed the stairs that I truly appreciated the terrible layout of this building. Even now, as I stood on the square room that was the top floor, I couldn't help but to stay still with awe at how disastrous this whole thing was.<p>

The fourth floor was swaying because of the strong winds. With that, you could guess how bad the rest of the floor was. Like the ground floor, this one also had tacky wallpaper, but with a snake motif and blue in color. Like in the ground floor as well, there were four doors, two on each wall. Unlike ground floor, though, there was a small couch on the center of the room, blue in color as well. This color gave the room a rather sad vibe, odd enough, since lately the color blue had made me happy... No, its probably better if I don't go with that train of thought. Giving Toothless a look, we walked towards the farthest door to the right. But as I opened the door and let Toothless in...

"Hey, Hiccup!"

Turning around to look at the source of that greeting, I saw Fishlegs, walking up the stairs, sweat visible on his brow. The Ultimate Encyclopedia walked towards me, looking nervous. Now this was unprecedented... Fishlegs wasn't a bad guy, but he wasn't the most outspoken either. He also was a very nervous individual so I wondered why did he want to talk to me...

"Uh, hey there, Fishlegs!", I greeted back awkwardly, Toothless looking at me from inside the room, popping his head out to look at

the new arrival with curious eyes.

The Ultimate Encyclopedia eyed the Night Fury nervously and I smiled. Giving a reassuring pat to Toothless' snout, the dragon looked at me and understood that there was nothing to worry about, and giving Fishlegs one last inquiring look, he returned to the inside of the room, where he paced for a few seconds before settling down on the floor next to my cruddy looking sleeping bag.

"W-wow... you really can control dragons!"

I turned around and rolled my eyes at Fishlegs' comment. This again...

"I don't control dragons. Like, I can sort of communicate with them but I... I never force them to do stuff!" I said, gesturing a bit agitatedly. "It's different, OK?!"

Fishlegs looked a bit taken aback but not any less impressed. "Still, that's impressive! Talking with dragons is unheard of, Hiccup! Are you sure you're not the Ultimate Dragon Interpreter or something?"

I snorted. "Nah, it's nothing impressive like that. I don't really... uh, understand what they're saying like, a 100%â€¦ it's just that I can somehow... sense? Yeah, sense what they want and say, but as far as understanding their language?", I shrugged, "There's a reason I got the Ultimate Lucky Student title by winning a raffle. I have no talent worth noticing..."

Fishlegs smiled sheepishly. "Well, its not like my talent is any better. I'm just good at remembering stuff I read."

"Hey, don't be like that; at least your talent is useful!", I said, trying to encourage him. "I bet knowing all kinds of stuff and never forgetting is amazing!"

"Oh, you're just saying that.", said Fishlegs, blushing a little. "You're actually... the first one to tell me that."

I find that hard to believe. You'd think people would rally around someone as smart as him.

>"Really?"<p>

The Ultimate Encyclopedia nods. "Yeah... I guess they find me a bit too overbearing?". Somehow, I don't think that's the thing that makes everyone distance themselves from them.

"Something tells me it's the fact that you can't help to spout tidbits of the things you know on every situation...", I tell him, trying to sugar coat the truth.

"Yeah, I guess you're right...", he says with a bashful smile. "But I can't help it! Trivia is just so much fun! And information... man, how can people not talk about the things the fill the world!". Fishlegs' eyes suddenly seem to fill with life. "I guess that's why I like reading and learning so much... and I mean, how can I not? The world is so full of neat and interesting things, and the fact that there's even much more to learn...! It's incredibly exciting to me!"

Suddenly, his expression falls. "Heheh... I guess I went overboard again, huh? Sorry about that, Hiccup."

"Oh, not at all!". I honestly didn't mind. I actually liked seeing him like that. It gave a glimpse... of the true Fishlegs. "To be honest, I wish I could find the world as interesting as you. Me? I'd settle with learning all about dragons and mapping the world..."

The blonde boy smiles, relieved that I'm not angry at him. "Well, I guess we're in the same boat, kinda. And I find you to be quite fascinating, in fact!"

I don't know how to take that comment.

"S-so... Hiccup, would it... oh gosh, this is so embarrassing!", says the Ultimate Encyclopedia, looking very antsy. "Would you... geez, I want to learn about dragons! It would be great if you... taught me everything you know! I just need to learn about them."

"Eh... I'm not sure...", I tell him. And I really wasn't sure. Because... dragons were supposed to be a secret from the village. But then again, somehow, Monobear had already learned from them. And everyone from our group already knew of their existence... so what was the harm in telling him? "Oh, Thor's beard, sure!"

Fishlegs unexpectedly hugged me, screaming with happiness (and leaving me on Valhalla's door), saying "thank you!" over and over again. When he released me, he did a little dance in place and I found myself smiling. This guy... "Oh, thank you, Hiccup! Seriously, I appreciate this a lot! You won't regret this, I swear! I'll teach you all I know in exchange and... Oh!" Suddenly, Fishlegs stopped in place, a thoughtful expression on his face. "If we're going to do this... I need to plan a study session... yes, I think about 3000 facts should be OK for starting..."

Gee... what did I get myself into?

"Sorry to leave so soon, Hiccup, but I gotta go! I can't wait until you teach me all about dragons, though!", and with that, he turned around and left practically running, the excitement clear in his face.

Fishlegs Ingerman, the Ultimate Encyclopedia. Despite his big size, his demeanor is mousy, truth be told. His knowledge is probably unrivaled and yet he's shy and a bit of a scaredy cat. And yet, today I saw the a bit of his true self; a person filled with wonder for the world and a thirst for knowledge, with a need to see what others haven't seen, a need to learn. And I also saw a person with a passion for the things he liked. I wasn't lying when I say that maybe, just maybe... I'm looking forward to teach him stuff about dragons.

...I have no idea what I'm going to tell him, though... I should... probably work on that.

\* \* \*

><p>Exhaustion caught up with me as I entered my room. Toothless opened an eye lazily and observed me as I walked towards my sleeping bag. Monobear wasn't lying when he said this was a Crummy Room. There was no furniture, the floor was missing some tiles, the only light

source was a light bulb that hung from the ceiling dangerously slow and the wallpaper was missing portions in places, the dark green pattern giving the room a depressing atmosphere. And it was chilly! There was a noticeable draft... and I could clearly hear someone (most likely the Twins) fighting somewhere on the floor.<p>

With a sigh, I got into my sleeping bag, which was incredibly thin and flimsy and did nothing to keep me warm. Thankfully, Toothless noticed this and inched closer to me in a bid to share body heat.

Along with exhaustion came a sudden surge of feelings. Somehow, I had been able to keep myself numb to all the things that had happened today, but apparently I had reached my limit. A tear escaped from my eye and that did it.

It was so unfair! Why?! Why was I going through this?! I just wanted to be someone I could be proud of... someone that my father accepted! And now... I'm trapped in this place, sleeping in this horrible room, not knowing if I'll see the next day or not, and not knowing if my family is even alive or if I even have a home still!

In comparison to all those things, this seemed petty to complain about, but I also had my first crush totally destroyed because who would even date a failure like me?!

And now I was hungry, my stomach gurgling and demanding food... all because I attended this school! "Ultimate Lucky Student" my butt, this was the worst possible outcome!

Tears silently fell from my face as I tried to hide my sobs. Toothless simply snuggled near me, purring worriedly but not moving away, simply staying near me as I hugged him, seeking comfort. And it was in this situation, filled with fear for my future, my family, and my well being, that I fell asleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>MONOBEAR THEATER<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Slow and steady wins the race, they say... but I say: 'Nuts to that!'"<p>

"In today's ever moving, never-resting world, anyone who doesn't get his ass into gear will be trampled by the rest and left behind! Speed is of the essence. Only idiots and old fools go slow. A swift individual will be preferred over those who try to "set their own pace"!

"Why do you think NASCAR racers are so popular? Why do you think fast food sells more than restaurant food? Weekly Manga is appreciated more than Monthly Manga, too!"

"In short, what matters the most is speed speed speed! Those times where patience was a virtue are long gone! So don't waste your time trying to get comfortable and get going, stupid. The red light changed to green just 1 second ago!"

("This Monobear Theater lasted 0.0002 seconds.")

\* \* \*

><p><strong>That Monobear Theater is totally a jab at myself. I feel like I'm moving at a snail's pace... and not a snail from Turbo, at that! We're getting close to the<br>"shit hits the fan" but I think I might be boring you a bit? What do you guys think? Should I pick up the pace, or no? Something you want to say? Please do let me know on the reviews!  
><strong>

**\*\*Also, Free Time Event voting is open again! This will be the last Free Time we'll have on this arc so choose wisely!\*\***

**\*\*Puhuhuhu... what does that mean? You know what that means...\*\***

**\*\*See ya later, guys!\*\***

## 21. 2 - Chapter 2 - Normal Days G

**\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days G\*\***

**\*\*First, I'd like to extend an apology to you all. It HAS been quite a while since the last update and I decided that I had left you hanging quite enough. Still, this chapter was supposed to be longer than this, but I was afraid of leaving you without anything, so the rest will be posted at a later day, as a separate chapter.\*\***

**\*\*Apologies, but I do hope you enjoy!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Jack's POV<span></strong></p></strong>

I've never actually experienced hunger like this before. I had to hand it to the Headmaster this time around, the bastard really found a way to torture us that was effective.

However, now its not the time to praise that bear. As Hic had said, we had to find a way out of here. Even if I was hungry. And even if this bed had made my back ache due to how stiff it was ("Normal Room" my ass., there was nothing in this room aside from my bed and a light fixture!)

So, ignoring the ache in my stomach, I swiftly rolled out of bed and ruefully put on some shoes (we we're going to trek through the snow, after all) and walked outside of my room.

Halfway down the stairs and near the lobby, I debated whether I should pick up Hic like usual or not. As I hesitated on the steps, however, I heard a hushed conversation.

"This is a bad idea, Anna."

"You're a bad idea, Elsa!"



Huh... Anna and Elsa...? What are they talking about?

...And why is Anna so bad at having hushed conversations?

Naturally, I did the right thing and I leaned closer to the wall in order to eavesdrop better. This conversation might be important, and it would be irresponsible of me to miss it, right? Right. So with bated breath, I waited hidden until they continued talking.

"Seriously, Anna, think this through.", said Elsa, sounding clearly exasperated. "You can't just declare that to a guy that you barely know!"

"But Elsa, he's not just some guy!", said an equally exasperated Anna, "He's Hiccup! Y'know... the guy we've been hanging around AND that saved our butts." She stated, in a matter-of-fact voice.

Oh no... she couldn't be talking about... no...

"Still, Anna, you have to be smart about this.", continued Elsa, not backing down. "You can't just declare your 'everlasting love' to a guy just like that. You should know better! Especially in the situation we are!"

"I trust Hiccup.", answered Anna, sounding serious. "He's not that kind of guy. He's sweet, he's smart... he's caring and trusting and yeah... he may be a bit sarcastic and he MAY be a little short but... but I just think that adds to his cuteness, you know?"

No, this can't be happening... Not like this, not her.

"Anna, you can't do this.", And I agreed with Elsa. "You don't even know if Mr. Haddock feels the same way. Haven't you noticed? He already has his eyes on someone. And someone has his eyes on him, too."

I tensed. This conversation... was full of things that I didn't want to hear.

"Even so... if that person doesn't make his move first, I'll do it myself. I'm gonna tell him.", says that... that girl... that girl that I hate so much right now. But why? Why am I getting angry? It's not like I have any right... and yet!

I can hear Elsa say something to Anna but at this point I'm not listening anymore.

Anna is going to confess. Possibly today. Or soon.

This is not the time to be side-tracked by stupid stuff like this. I should focus on finding a way out.

And yet...

And yet...!

I cannot allow this to happen. Not before I have my say! And I'm not even sure if I'm able to say so...! I must keep them apart until I'm ready... yes... but I should also not neglect our search for an

escape route. Man, there's so much stuff to do and to keep track off....!

Cursing all the gods I know (which aren't that many), I try to walk into the lobby as innocent-looking as possible as I try to formulate a plan in order to keep Hic away from Anna. Thankfully, the girls don't really mind my presence, instead focusing on glaring at each other. Soon enough, the rest of the guys start filing into the lobby and I find myself looking out for that familiar mop of brown hair.

I have to find him first before Anna does.

However, Nick inadvertently ruined my plans, as he started a discussion that I honestly wasn't paying attention to. I knew subconsciously that I had to pay attention and yet my priorities were completely messed up. So, instead of being responsible, I tuned out the Ultimate Sculptor's words and focused on the lobby's staircase, waiting for the walking fishbone to arrive.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

I woke up due to the gurgling of my stomach. Instantly, I remembered where I was. Honestly, I wished I could have stayed asleep for far more longer in order to escape my reality, but my hunger pangs prevented me from accomplishing that. I hadn't eaten anything since our usual breakfast yesterday and it was showing.

Trying to get my mind off my hunger, I checked my ElectroID as Toothless gave me a good morning lick.

It was 6:55 in the morning. I groaned... Guess I did get used to Monobear waking us up at 7 AM on the dot... I woke before even that time! Worse of all... I was awake with a whole day ahead of me... without food.

But thinking like this wasn't helping either. No, I had to remain positive! I had to search for a way out... for all our sakes. So with my growling stomach as a new companion, Toothless and I left the Crummy Room, myself actually shivering due to the nonstop drafts that assailed me all night long. The sooner we got out of here so that I didn't have to sleep on this lousy room, the better.

\* \* \*

><p>I didn't see anyone, not even Jack (yes, I was disappointed that he hadn't come to pick me up like he usually did, but I guess the situation we're in doesn't permit that) as I made my way down the stairs. It wasn't until I arrived on the lobby that I saw everyone gathered there.<p>

I could tell without being near them; they we're all hungry. It was subtle, but they all looked less energetic, the bags under their eyes noticeable. Some of them (Rapunzel, Peter and Fishlegs) even wobbled a little as they turned around to see me arrive. The effects of hunger were already showing themselves.

That only motivated me to look for an exit even more. There was no time to fool around.

"Heeeey, Hiiiiic!"

The King of Fooling Around greeted me with a big smile, waving at me excitedly with his hand over his head. Still, though Jack looked the same as always, I could tell he was hungry; he looked even paler than usual and when he stopped waving at me he let his arm drop heavily, as if it were too much effort to keep it up.

Yeah... I had to do it... for him. I had to find a way out.

I greeted the white haired idiot with a smile of my own, and walked towards the group, joining them on their discussion. North nodded as he saw me join, and resumed talking.

"There really is not much I can tell you all that isn't obvious.", said the Ultimate Sculptor, putting a strong front. "We will all search the entire resort and report immediately if something is found. Understood?"

The response from our group to his order could barely be considered enthusiastic, but we all still left the hotel nevertheless. We all understood how important it was to find a way out, so we set out as soon as North dismissed us. I turned around and faced Toothless, taking a deep breath as a way to motivate myself. "Alright, bud. Let's do our best. We're totally gonna find a way out."

Toothless answered my motivational spiel with a croon and a nod. Bounding towards the exit, I followed the enthusiastic Night Fury with a reluctant smile on my face. Let my bud make a serious situation a light-hearted one with his apparently boundless energy.

"Hey, um, Hiccup!"

The voice of Anna stops me from leaving. The Ultimate Hiker runs towards me with an uneasy smile on her face, the rubbing of hands and slight blush and nervous laughter clearly making it apparent that she wanted to discuss something with me, but she wasn't exactly confident about saying it to me.

"I was wondering if... well, you know... it could be dangerous to be outside by yourself so... y'know... safety in numbers and all and...!", she rambled, and I wished she went straight to the point because I didn't know what she wanted. "Hahaha... All I'm saying is... can I accompany you on your search?"

What? That's it? Sweet Mother of Dis, I was wondering if this was going to be a serious conversation! "Of course you can come with me, Anna.". I tell her, trying to reassure her that I didn't mind her company. "I have no issue with you tagging along an-"

"Too bad he already has someone to go with."

Suddenly, I am yanked to the side strongly as I hear the familiar deep voice of Jack, who pulls me to his side and hugs me with one arm. Taking a look at his face, I see he's smiling at Anna, but the way his jaw is clenched... tells me he isn't really happy.

What's going on...? He's been acting REALLY odd lately.

The Ultimate Mystery looks at me, still wearing that fake smile, before asking. "Isn't that right, Hic?"

I can only offer an eloquent "Uh..." as a response. I actually had never talked with him about him being my partner today, but I certainly didn't mind that. But somehow, the way he was acting didn't leave a good taste in my mouth... There was no need to exclude Anna.

"Well, yeah, I guess...", I continued, watching the Ultimate Hiker's expression fall, "But you can come, Anna! There's nothing wrong with a big group!", and as I said that, Jack's grip on my arm got so strong I had to elbow him on the gut slightly. What the hell, man?

"No... it's OK.", said the Anna with an awkward chuckle. "I should probably stay with Elsa, anyway. She doesn't really get along with the others so I can't leave her alone. See ya, Hiccup." And with that, she turned around and walked back towards her sister, who was watching the whole exchange from the couch through narrowed eyes. Great, I was probably back on her black list and it wasn't even my fault. Anna decided to talk to me for Thor knows why, so why do I have to suffer?!

As soon as the Ultimate Hiker left, Jack released me from his hold, letting out sigh before genuinely smiling at me. "Well, Hic... shall we go?"

"No.", I said, as I crossed my arms. "What the Hel was that all about, Jack? We never agreed to partner up today!"

The whitette's smile deflated faster than an air-balloon punctured by a Deathly Nadder's spines, instead being replaced by a nervous grin.

"D-do we even have to agree to be partners, Hic? I mean... do I really have to set an appointment with you everytime I want to hang out?"

"No, not really, it's just...", I counter, unable to shake the feeling that there's something behind Jack's actions that I don't get. "I can't imagine why would you want to hang out with me all the time... Don't you want to hang out with the others?"

"Heh... it's not like any of them trust me that much anymore...", he answers before his expression turns into one of annoyance, "but what the hell, Hic? The only reason I want to be with you is because I like you! You're like, my best friend here!"

Hearing that makes me happy, but also a little sad. It only reminds me of the fact that we will only be friends. But still, I'm glad Jack sees me that way. I've... never had a best friend outside of my bud, as you may recall. "S-seriously... you keep complimenting me like this...", I say with an embarrassed laugh, "you're probably sugarcoating me to ask something out of me..."

"Hahaha... yeaaah, about that..."

I knew it. There WAS an ulterior motive behind he forcing himself on

me. No one... could possibly like me enough to want to be with me all the time.

"Is it more love advice, Jack?", I asked, remembering how troubled he was these past days. "Because I don't think I have to remind you that I'm terrible at it."

Jack's face had a blank expression before changing to one of befuddlement. "Wh-wha? How did yo- I mean, no! Hic, c'mon... m-maybe?"

I rolled my eyes. "It wasn't that hard to guess, Jack. I mean... that's why you've been acting so weird, right? You did as I told you, and you went and told the person you liked that you... well, liked them, yeah?". I gulped. Why was I touching this subject? I didn't want to hear it and yet I wanted to know... the answer. Maybe I needed to know what happened so that I could actually get over him? Over this impossible folly that is having a crush on this idiot?

"Wha-? No! I haven't told hi- them! I haven't... actually told them anything yet...", says Jack, looking awfully bashful.

But if he hasn't told him (Jack, your slips of tongue are so obvious), then why was he acting so weird?

I briefly wondered who Jack was interested in and had a weird mix of a shudder and laugh as I pictured Jack and Snotlout for some reason. Eesh...

"You have to tell him, Jack!", I say, a little relieved but not entirely so, "That's the only reasonable tip I can give you, to be honest..."

"Why are we even discussing this?!", says Jack, the blush on his face clearly visible. "I-I just want to hang out, Hic! Nothing more! Really! Maybe we'll talk, yeah, but I have no ulterior motives! No strings attached, the whole Overland Experience!"

I'm not sure about that whole 'no strings attached' thing but... "Despite how tempting it is, I'll pass on the Overland Experience."

"Geez, Hic, do I have to beg to you now or something?", he says, looking a bit hurt.

I bit my lip before replying, feeling a little guilty. "No, Jack, it's not that! It's just... I think it'll be better if we all split up, now that I think about it. We'll cover more ground that way... but we can hang out later, OK?"

The whittete simply pouts and looks to the side with arms crossed, clearly not OK with this. "Alright... fine... but its going to be just us, OK? You still owe me that snowboarding lesson, after all!", he says after a while, the pout replaced by a sly smile and a pointing finger.

"Do you really want to snowboard in a situation like this?", I say with an arched eyebrow. His response is a smile with an arched eyebrow of his own. This guy... is unbelievable.

"I won't take a no for an answer, Hic.", he says, his smile not faltering.

"Aaand I guess I have no choice." I say through narrowed eyes. "Geez, fine. The snowboarding lesson is not guaranteed but yeah, we can do something alone I guess. There won't be much to do, given that we're trapped."

I... I promised that but...

I actually don't want to hang out with Jack. Because he'll probably talk... no, he'll definitely talk about his crush and I don't think I can handle that. Am I selfish for doing this? Am I being a bad friend? Does it make me a terrible person... wanting to avoid things that cause me pain?

Murders and love drama... I never expected my life to become this complicated. I want to... kinda avoid this situation. Am I using "find a way out" as an excuse? Probably.

After saying good bye to Jack with a forced smile, Toothless and I left the hotel and went about in our search.

But...

Even after circling the Grand Square. Even after walking around the Meade Hall... Even after absentmindedly looking around the Slippery Slope and the surrounding forest... Even as I walked past the Final Dead Room and checked out the MiM Library and its surroundings... and even though I thoroughly checked the A/V Room in search for more clues...

And even though I spent most of the day avoiding Jack and thanking Odin for the poor visibility (you can't actually snowboard if the visibility is bad)â€|

And even though with each step, I could feel my energy leaving me, me getting hungrier with every passing moment, the cold seeping through my bones slowly but surely...

Even then, I found nothing. No exit, no way out. No matter how much I wandered, how much I trekked through the snow...

Nothing.

This whole day... was a waste. No matter how much we searched, nothing of use was found. And the blizzard didn't die down either, and the sun didn't go down. My ElectroID displayed 8 PM but it was still light outside. It was weird. It was unnatural.

And yet, this was my reality. A never-ending blizzard prison where the day never ends, and the only thing that shows that time is passing is the emptiness of my stomach.

With a defeated sigh, Toothless and I returned to the hotel, anxiety swelling inside my chest.

Because I had nothing to show and...

...And because Jack was going to be there. The guy that I spent my entire day avoiding, the guy that I promised I would spend my day with... a promise that I broke...

Still, I had to go and meet up with everyone else. Maybe someone actually found the exit? With that feeble optimism in my heart, I made my way to the hotel's lobby.

That optimism vanished the instant I saw the eyes of everyone in the room as they all turned around to look at me.

Dull, tired eyes, devoid of any hope or enthusiasm. A clear sign of a fruitless endeavor.

And there... over the reception desk, leaning on it while facing me, was Jack, his blue eyes dim and, upon seeing me, filled with hurt.

They didn't have to say anything. Just by looking at them, I could tell; they hadn't found anything.

"Any luck...?", came Rapunzel's voice, almost a whisper, her face carrying a small, hopeful smile.

A smile that disappeared as she saw me shake my head in denial.

Somehow, everyone else's mood fell even more after seeing that.

And our mood was soon going to go on a free fall with no signs of recovering.

Because HE appeared soon after.

"Geez, you guys look terrible!"

The cartoony, fake-worry in his voice was loud and clear in the hotel's lobby. Monobear was looking at us with a tilted head, carefully observing us as if he really cared about us.

Snotlout sneers in response to Monobear's claim. "Of course we look terrible. Why do you think that is?!"

"Man, this is troubling...", said Monobear, not really paying attention to Snotlout's retort. "As a teacher, I'm supposed to look after you guys and yet you look so... unhealthy! Seriously, a soft breeze could probably knock you guys over!"

...We're like this because of you, you insufferable stuffed toy!

Suddenly, the Headmaster pounds his palm with his fist. "Ah! I have an idea!"

"What now?", asks Aster, annoyed, his gray hair disheveled from the rough winds outside.

"I just figured... I should probably give all of you guys some lessons! Yes! Lessons on how to lead a healthy lifestyle! I bet that will make you guys feel better!" said the bear, a giggle escaping his

snout.

"Uh... we could lead a healthier lifestyle if ya gave us food, ya know?!", said Merida, her usual spunkiness nowhere to be seen.

"Right, right.", said Monobear, dismissing the redhead's words with his paw. "In any case... the lessons will start tomorrow at 7 AM! I will not tolerate tardiness or absences, by the way! So please try to wake on time, yes? I'll see you all tomorrow at the Great Hall!"

And without waiting for us to object, Monobear disappeared.

"I somehow doubt we'll get an actual lesson from this...", said Fishlegs, looking at the spot where Monobear was standing with worry.

"No shit." muttered Snoutlout, looking grumpier than usual.

"But if this is similar to all of Monobear's threats... then we have no choice." Tooth says, looking smaller than she usually does, her labcoat looking bigger than normal.

"OK, you know what?", says Flynn, standing up faster than I expected. "I'm tired of playing along with that bear. I'm not going to go to his stupid lesson!"

Suddenly, North's towering figure is over the Ultimate Thief, looking extremely intimidating and also extremely angry. "I understand you are frustrated,", begins the Ultimate Sculptor, his voice restrained, "but please do not act so recklessly! Uselessly defying the Headmaster without thinking could put us all in danger, not only you!"

The Ultimate Thief looks at North with a stunned expression before looking away, grunting and whispering under his breath: "Why do you even care...?"

"Because I will not tolerate more throwing of lives. Uselessly throwing away your life is something I will not allow; that goes for Monobear too.", he says as he addresses us all. "Let us all get as much rest as we can and then we will tackle that beast and his trap as best as we can tomorrow. Don't do anything reckless."

"I will keep you as safe as I can, so please trust me, yes?"

North finishes his speech with a broad smile. He still looks tired and yet... and yet he managed to keep a cheery vibe. Even though he's probably as stressed as us, he still looks after us, trying to look strong.

Trust... Should I really do that, in a place where trusting each other can be fatal?

The fact... that I'm thinking like that is probably Monobear's trap. I shouldn't fall for the Mastermind's trap... and I definitely shouldn't distrust North either.

So even though I'm ready to keel over from exhaustion, I try to answer as enthusiastically as I can. Because if North can make that



effort... even I, who am not an Ultimate, should be able to do the same. So with a little more hope despite the terrible day we had and how fruitless our search was, I make my way to my room after everyone else leaves the lobby.

...Or I would have done so, if a certain angry looking whitette wasn't glowering at me and blocking my way, his arms crossed and his stance firm. Jack was standing at his full height, and that told me he wasn't going to let me go anywhere without an explanation.

Yeeep. I was dreading this confrontation. Oh boy...

"H-hey there..." I said with a nervous wave of my hand. Jack's only reaction was an arched eyebrow.

"What was that all about, Hic? You totally stood me up!", said the Ultimate Mystery after a few awkward minutes of silence that I spent mostly fidgeting under his gaze, not wanting to meet his probing, blue eyes.

I finally had to look at his face, and what I saw almost made me forget the excuse I had come up with just a few moments ago. I was expecting anger, but instead I saw true hurt. Jack's brow was furrowed and though he wore a slight scowl, I could see how watery his eyes were getting.

Yeah, this was going to be harder than I thought... I couldn't exactly tell him I didn't want to be with him. That would hurt him even more. And it wasn't exactly the truth either... I just didn't want to be with him and his love troubles...

Man, I really sound like a jerk now, huh...

Taking a deep sigh to prepare myself, I try to recall the excuse I had come up with.

"I'm sorry, Jack... it's just-", I began, gesturing wildly like I always do when I get nervous, "I-I just thought... y'know! With how the blizzard is raging and all... the... visibility! Yeah! This kind of weather isn't good for snowboarding lessons! But... I-I didn't want to disappoint you by telling you this so... yeah... I kinda avoided you to not disappoint you, you know...?"

...Honestly, this had to be my worst lie ever.

Which is why it made me feel even guiltier when Jack actually believed me. His hurt expression changed to one of understanding, a sad smile decorating his face as he chuckled at my pathetic excuse.

"Really, Hic? It's so you to worry about nothing.", he says as he gives me a playful push, "I wouldn't have minded, really! I...", his expression darkens a bit as he continues, "I was worried, you know? I thought... I thought something had happened to you..."

Oh... this guy was probably worrying all the time about me and all I cared about was my own issues...

"I'm sorry, Jack.. really I-", but before I can finish, he stops me as he raises one finger in order to shush me.

"It's alright Hic! Really! No harm done, either to you or me! Besides, it was my fault for suggesting the snowboarding thing... I wasn't thinking through...", he says as he laughs at himself.

"Yeah well... I'm still sorry. I shouldn't have avoided you." I offer.

"Don't be, Hic. There's always tomorrow, anyways, right?", he says with a carefree smile that seriously makes me feel incredibly guilty.

"Yeah...", is all I can say with a reluctant smile.

Everything after that was a blur. Whether it was because of the hunger, or because my mind just was in overdrive, I didn't notice when I got into my room.

As I lied down on my cheap sleeping bag, petting Toothless absentmindedly, a single question stood out from all other thoughts in my mind:

"What am I going to do?"

That question referred to everything that was troubling me.

Our current situation.

My crush on Jack.

This Camp's mysteries.

But no matter how much I stared at the dilapidated ceiling of my room, the answer to that question never came. Instead, what greeted me was sleep. And so, with my query unanswered, I drifted into the darkness of unconsciousness, lulled to sleep by the continuous whispers of the drafts that chilled me to the bone as they passed through my room.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-MONOBEAR THEATER-<strong>

"Have you ever wondered?"

"Have you ever wondered how many relationships never come to pass?"

>"How many unrequited feelings get sidestepped by the uninterested party? How many unsaid feelings are left unsaid due to embarrassment? How many confessions are left untold because of feelings of inadequacy? How many relationships never fully bloom due to societal norms?" "Well, I've never wondered! That's why I always get such a nice beauty rest! Worrying over silly stuff like that... is for fools and monkeys! I am a bear after all!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Hunger.

I've never been so hungry in my life.

It was a horrible, hollow feeling. I felt no energy whatsoever. My head hurt and my limbs refused to move. I felt like I was going to fall every time I took a step and I wasn't sure I was going to be able to get up if I did fall.

But even so, I got up. I woke up before 7 AM in order to get to Monobear's lesson.

On our way there, Toothless and I passed by Aster, who taught us how to use snow as water. We thanked the Ultimate Survivalist as we drank our fill. It did little to satiate our hunger, but at least our thirst was satiated. Aster smiled warmly at our thanks, ruffling my hair as he walked towards the Meade Hall-look alike, and urged us to hurry on "before that lil' bugger starts talkin' our ears off."

Toothless followed the Ultimate Survivalist with a sprint on his step, and I chuckle at that. Guess the easy way to a dragon's heart is through its stomach, after all.

My good mood gets ruined, however, as we enter the Great Hall.

Everyone looks so tired and pale. They seem so out of it that most of them don't even look at me. Peter is actually sitting down near a pillar and the Twins are unusually quiet as they stand around gazing at nothing with glossed-over eyes.

And that's not all I see when I enter.

Thick glass walls can be seen in the middle of the Great Hall, forming a big rectangle. And inside that rectangle, I can see a table stocked with cooking utensils, a fridge and a stove.

Upon seeing that, my stomach makes a loud rumbling noise. Yeah... I can see now why everyone is in such a sour mood. The instant I saw those things, I remembered how hungry I was.

What was Monobear thinking?

I didn't have to wait long to find out. As he always did, the Headmaster appeared inside the rectangle of glass, looking over us from a stool I hadn't noticed behind the table with a gleeful smile. He was wearing a chef's coif and a blue apron with white spots, as if he were a cook.

A sense of dread filled me.

"Oh, looks like everyone is here! What a pity..." said the Headmaster with a disappointed expression

"Welcome, one and all, to Monobear's Healthy Lifestyle Lesson!", he greeted us with enough forced joy that it made me gag. "Today... we'll learn some nice, healthy recipes! After all, a good, healthy life style begins on the kitchen! Or so they say! Don't woorry! The recipes we'll cover will be to KILL for, Puhuhu!"

"Oh, by the way. I don't appreciate interruptions in my lessons, so if any of you decides to be the class clown", he said with a dangerous glare as he stared at Jack in particular, "I'll activate my punishment time! So sit tight and let's begin our health lifestyleeeee!"

I immediately groaned.

'Healthy Life Lessons'â€| yeah, right. More like, 'more urging us to kill' shenanigans!

Monobear's supposed lesson was a cooking class. And it was absolutely maddening. These were the worst 15 minutes of my life. I couldn't help but to whimper as I saw the loathsome bear move around the kitchen, cutting up vegetables and seasoning the ingredients as he went over a simple chicken noodle soup recipe.

I wasn't the only one.

I could hear the symphony of gurgling stomachs and soft gasps as the delicious smell of the broth Monobear was cooking wafted all over us. I had to continuously soothe Toothless as he tried to walk over towards the Headmaster. Those 15 minutes felt like endless torture and I honestly never felt so relieved that classes had ended. I used to love school in Berk too...

"And that's how you make chicken soup for the despairing soul~", finished Monobear gleefully. "So, how about it? Do you feel healthier and refreshed already?"

"Stop. Please, stop this.", cried Tooth, tears actually streaming from her face as she fell defeated to the floor.

"Please, man... don't do this to us. Just...! Let us go... please...", begged Snotlout.

"Hrmm! But I can't let you do that unless-", began the Headmaster but Snotlout interrupted him.

"Please! I'll do anything! I'll kill anyone! But please... please let me out from this hell!"

As soon as his words left his lips, a blur of movement catches my attention. Almost instantly, Toothless is curling defensively around me, Jack standing next to me with a ridiculously open stance. However, I appreciate the fact that he's worried about me... more than he'll ever know, probably.

"Snotlout! Do not fall for the beast's trap!", says North standing tall, but the Ultimate Heavy Lifter doesn't back down, panic clear in his eyes.

"Leave me alone, man! I've fucking had it! I'm hungry and tired and scared and I can't take this anymore!", his eyes scan the whole room like a mad animal. "A-and if I have to kill someone to make this stop I will do it! You hear me?! I'll fucking kill you!"

'But Snotlout... you can't do that!", shouted Rapunzel, looking scared. "If you do, Astrid's and Sandy's deaths will-"

"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, THEN?!", shouts Snotlout as he closes his eyes tight and clenches his fists. "DO YOU WANT ME TO DIE HERE?! TO JUST... SIT HERE AND STARVE?!"

I understand how he feels. I understand how scary and utterly hopeless our situation looks. But even so, I...

"I'd... rather have that happen to us."

Everyone looks at me with wide eyes as they hear my mumbling. Feeling more resolute than ever, I face the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's shocked face with a firm expression.

"I'd rather... die here trusting everyone, than survive by distrusting any of you." I turn to face the Headmaster, who is looking at me with a blank expression. "That's why... for Sandy's and Astrid's sake... That's why I'll keep fighting you. I will not succumb to your despair. And if that means starving right here, then that's what I'll do."

I truly believe that. I never want to dirty my hands with other people's blood, directly or indirectly. And these guys... are my friends. Even if we forgot, we were friends in the past. That's why... I'll never betray them.

"Hmph. That's cool and all, Hiccy, buuuut... I wonder...", says Monobear as he turns his back to us, sounding pensive. "Will that resolution hold for another day? I can't wait what will happen in tomorrow's Healthy Lifestyle Lesson... Upupupu..."

Monobear's trailing laughter as he disappears almost destroys my resolution. But I have to believe. I have to believe that everyone will endure another day. But even though I truly want to believe in them, worry manages to surface in my mind in a single sentence:

We need to find that exit before its too late.

We're not going to last any longer. And though I really meant what I said, I'd rather all of us leave here alive.

So without saying much to each other, we all dispersed for the day.

This time... maybe this time for sure... we will find a way out.

\* \* \*

><p>As I walked around in search for an escape route, I wandered into the clearing that housed the Final Dead Room. Still deciding to avoid the obvious death trap that the room was, I made to leave before movement near the door of that room caught my attention.<p>

Leaning on the wall next to the door was the familiar, tall, frame of the Ultimate Survivalist, Aster.

And just like before, he was painting eggs. Aster was completely entranced, his focus on the egg so absolute he didn't notice my or Toothless' presence.

I observed him for a few minutes as he colored the egg with a blue

hue and pink dots before my curiosity got the best of me and, hesitating a bit, I called out to him.

Aster actually jumped, his eyes wide as plates, at my greeting, but upon seeing it was me, he relaxed, a grumpy expression clear on his face.

"Gee, ankle-biter, don't scare me like 'tat!"

I chuckled a bit at that, which only made Aster huff, annoyed. I apologized, though and upon hearing that, the silver-haired teen went back to painting.

"I didn't... uh, peg you for the artist type.", I commented, trying to strike up conversation.

The Ultimate Survivalist looked up at my comment, a blank expression as he processed what I said before chuckling. "Nah, I ain't no artist. Didn't I tell ya already? This is my way to cope."

Oh, yeah. He DID tell me that. However, I still... find this odd. Aster is the Ultimate Survivalist and yet it seems like...

"I... just don't get it...", I begin, which makes Aster look at me again. "I... I'd thought you wouldn't waste food due to you being, well, you know... The Ultimate Survivalist. And yet... here we have you wasting a... uh, perfectly good egg..."

Or well, that's how it looked like to me. Who was I to criticise? Looks like I ran my mouth again before thinking...

Aster looks at me with narrowed eyes before he stores his paint brush on a pouch on his hip. "I get your concern, kiddo. And ya would be correct, if these were entire eggs, but they aren't."

Huh?

Aster looks at my confused expression before smirking and pocketing the already painted egg on his other pouch. "These are just the egg shells, kid. I emptied 'em beforehand. Like, do ya honestly think I would have starved myself by painting these instead of eatin' 'em?", the Ultimate Survivalist rolls his eyes. "Hangin' around with Frostbite is makin' ya dumber."

I blush at how obvious his explanation sounds. Right. Silly Haddock.

"W-well... at least it's nice to know that you, uh, have your priorities straight," I joke, trying to laugh away my dumb assumption turned into mistake, "its just... that, you know... painting eggs is such an odd hobby. Especially in this situation..."

Aster's expression turned serious and I actually winced. He looked as if he could kill a bear right now and me being smaller than a bear... yeah, I was intimidated.

"This is not a hobby, kid." He started. "I guess I can see how you would think that but... it's important to me." Aster's gaze softens as he seems to recall something, and he continues speaking. "It's true, we have somethin' to be doin' right now that is important."

But... we cannot let that be the only thing that is in our minds. If we just focus on the things we think are important, we'll miss the things that truly matter."

I blinked. I see... I kinda understand what he means. He's sayin'... saying... that we shouldn't just focus on our goals. We should also take time to do other things, dedicate time to ourselves... "So, that's why you paint eggs?"

The Ultimate Survivalist nods. "Yea'... it keeps my mind clear. I mean... if I didn't do this... I'd be too stressed to focus and I wouldn't think clearly..." he nods to himself as he talks, "and I'd definitely would have less chances for survival if I weren't thinkin' straight... or at least, that's how they put it."

I nod at his words. It made sense now, and I agreed. Being to stressed definitely leads to bad decisions. Who would've thought relaxing was also an important skill to have to survive? I feel like I've been underestimating Aster's talent now...

"Sorry, for... uh, jumping to conclusions, Aster..."

The Ultimate Survivalist looks at me with surprise before ruffling my hair affectionately. "No harm done, ankle-biter. Imparting life lessons to tykes is one of the few things I'm good at."

At that, I pout. "Hey... I'm not THAT young..."

But to be honest... I'm not bothered by the treatment. Aster just... gives this big brother aura... is it weird of me to think this way?

Aster laughs at my comment before he walks away, deciding to return to his search. As I watch his retreating figure, I begin to realize that there's more to Aster than his intimidating demeanor, wild silver-haired mane adorned with feathers, and his tattooed and scarred exterior. Inside, I'm sure... is a softer, caring and wise side... one I'm glad I go to witness, if only for a bit.

As I turn away to explore more, however, I realize something.

Something that Aster said that bothered me, even though it was something small. He said "they said so"... but who are they? Mentors?

Deciding to focus on my task for now, and saving this topic for later, I quickly made my way out of the clearing.

\* \* \*

><p>By the time my ElectroID buzzes 10 PM, I can't take another step. I've searched the whole area and all the installations thrice by now. I even debated trying to climb down the cliff, but a similarly tired Anna I found near the cliff with Elsa advised me against the idea. And if an Ultimate Hiker said it was impossible... then there was no way a talentless fishbone like me was going to be able to climb down.<p>

And so, defeated, tired, cold and hungry, I made my way to my

room.

It felt as if I were in a trance. I kept walking and walking, not really noticing my surroundings. The only thing that made me feel anchored to reality was Toothless, who was looking worse for wear. He spaced out a lot and yet he never left me off his sight. Even when we made our way to our room and we struggled climbing the stairs all the way to the fourth floor, he helped me pick myself up whenever I stumbled on a step.

Even though he was probably cold in our drafty, crummy room, he curled himself around me protectively.

I give my bud a hug, trying to tell him without words how much I appreciate him. Without him, this whole thing would be more harrowing. And it is for his sake... that I will not give up.

Because even someone as useless as me has things to do still. I can't die here. I cannot let my bud suffer here.

And... I cannot die without saying the things that need to be said.

It's weird. It takes a near-death experience to make people realize things, it seems. I've been avoiding Jack ever since he revealed he had a crush on someone, but now, now I crave his company because... now that I'm here, near death's door...

I need to let him know.

If he was brave enough to tell me about his crush... then I should at least do the same. It's only fair, right?

I don't want my life to be filled with what-ifs. I want to lead a life full of confidence. One that I can say: "I'm proud I've lived like this".

Mostly, I want to feel proud of myself, just like my parents did.

That's why... even if I know its futile and even if I know that he will not reciprocate... I will tell him.

I will tell all the people I love how important they are to me.

And after giving Toothless another hug (which he returns with a lick of his own), I try to fall asleep, trying my best to ignore the roaring in my stomach.

**\*\*--MONOBEAR THEATER--\*\***

"Honestly, selflessness is unnatural."

"It shouldn't exist."

"People who put others before themselves are idiots and deserve to be stepped on. Because... because the foundation of our world goes against that! They even have the basics wrong! In our world, the weak are eaten by the strong. The weak don't help the strong; no no, they





with blinking lights that I had never seen before. But as soon as I blinked, everything was back to normal.

My hallucinations didn't stop with me and my bud. As I walked towards the Great Hall, I saw in my distorted vision a Rapunzel with short, brown hair and a brunette Jack. Chalking it up to my hunger-induced delusions, I entered the Great Hall and braced myself for Monobear's tortuous lesson.

Perhaps it was my hunger, or perhaps it was payback from defying the Headmaster, but the lesson today was even more excruciating than yesterday. Monobear went through a detailed lesson on how to prepare tofu hamburgers and though I personally didn't like it, the mere smell was enough to make me wish for a bite or three. Somehow, I had the feeling Monobear was prolonging the lesson in order to make us suffer even more.

And when I thought the lesson would end...

"Hey hey... you guys look like as your puppy had been ran over! Are you still not feeling healthy?", asked Monobear looking smug.

"Shut up... ", groaned Flynn as he flopped around on the floor, his energetic behavior nowhere to be seen, a grimace on his face.

"Hmm, how beary troubling...", said the Headmaster, faking a look of concern as he crossed his arms and tilted his head, looking deep in thought, "...I know what will make you healthier though! I'm going to give you guys a bonus lesson!"

I didn't have enough energy to complain. No one did. We could only stand there as Monobear continued his torture. I tried to close my eyes in order to try to ignore the Headmaster's lesson, to escape this reality.

Unfortunately, reality found a severe way to bring me back to it.

"Aaaalrighty!", shouted the Headmaster happily. "Today... I'll also teach you how to make delicious sushi rolls out of cod!"

That did it. As the Headmaster brought out the fish, something unexpected, dreadful and yet predictable happen.

For you see, I had forgotten that we weren't the only ones being starved to death.

And when I heard that primal roar, a roar so strong that it shook the room, I realized...

Toothless looked like a black flash as he ran towards the glass walls and tackled them forcefully, the transparent material shaking but not budging. The Night Fury... my bud... in his hunger, his well-behaved, restrained self had be forsaken in favor of one who's only goal was survival. Self-preservation.

Toothless savagely attacked the glass walls with claws and teeth and body, desperately trying to get sustenance. He was totally unrecognizable and so unlike himself.

"Hey! Keep your pet in a leash, Hiccy!", complained the Headmaster, though he didn't look afraid or even annoyed. He looked like he... was enjoying this display, even going so far as to flaunt the fish in front of the dragon.

Through the haze of my mind, the Camp Trip Rules echoed back:

**\*\*You are not allowed to harm the Headmaster. The Headmaster won't hurt you unless you do so first.\*\***

I grew scared at once. I realized it then... this was Monobear's goal. If I didn't stop Toothless soon, he was going to harm Monobear and... and!

"TOOTHLESS, STOP!", I shouted as I ran towards my bud, who only intensified his assault as he saw the Headmaster taunt him with food. I tried to stop him, try to snap him back to his old self, but the moment I reached him and touched his back...

A pair of green, acid-like eyes with narrowed slits were looking at me as the Night Fury turned to look at me. There was no sight of the old Toothless in those eyes. All that was there was pure primal instinct. I took a step back as the Night Fury proceeded to advance on me slowly, as if he were deliberating whether I was edible or not...

I refuse... I refuse to believe that... that Toothless would...!

"Bud... hey...! It's me... Hiccup!", I said to him warily, trying to calm him down, and yet... "Toothless... calm down, OK? Let's all calm down...!", and yet, no matter how much I talked to him... "Back off... back off, bud!"

The black dragon started to lick his lips, the retractable teeth visible as he crept more and more closely to me, I unknowingly backing myself into a corner.

"Toothless! No! Please, bud!"

I could see a faint glow on the Night Fury's mouth as he opened it and he spread his wings and reared himself to shoot.

"Hic!"

I heard someone shout as soon as I saw the plasma blast forming on the Night Fury's mouth...!

It was over in an instant.

Just as the dragon released his attack, someone slammed hard against him, redirecting the blast away from me. A deafening yet familiar explosion sounded to my right. I heard the girls scream, and my surrounding was filled with smoke.

I instantly searched around, trying to see if no one was hurt. As the smoke cleared I got a clean view of what had happened. Toothless laid in front of me, shaking his head as if he had awoken from a trance. Next to him were North and Jack, who were looking at the dragon with fear. I see... so they tackled him...

I looked to my right and saw where the blast had hit. A pillar had been hit and though the girls were there, safe and sound... they had singed clothes and faces... faces that also displayed fear.

Suddenly, I was trapped in an embrace.

"Hic! Are you... are you OK?!"

Jack's deep voice was worried in tone. He patted my hair and looked at every angle of my face, his own displaying a concerned look as he meticulously searched my body for injuries.

If I hadn't almost died... I would be relishing this. But I was too shocked.

My bud... my best friend... had almost killed me.

He almost ate me.

Me... his best friend...

"Aw poo! And I thought something exciting was going to happen!"

Monobear's disappointed tone angered me. He... had forced Toothless to kill me. To harm us. He really... really was going too far!

"But maaan, that was too close! If I were you, Hiccy, I'd kept that lizard of yours in a cage!"

My anger reached a boiling point. I struggled to turn around and face Monobear as Jack refused to let me go. "Wh-what?! This... this is your fault, you know?! If you weren't so bent on trying to kill us all...! Toothless!", I said as I directed my gaze at my bud, who looked at me with apologetic eyes, "Dragons are great creatures, peaceful, wise! And yet... you only use them to try to spread despair! This... is definitely your fault!"

"Is it, though?", said Monobear, looking serious. "I mean... YOU'RE the one who decided it was OK to bring a dangerous animal into this place. You just can't argue against this, y'know? Animals might be great and all, but they're also instinct first and foremost. And well, keeping an alpha predator who is hungry around a group of walking food... how is it my fault this happened? I mean, your friends think the same, no?"

I looked around and... I saw what Monobear meant. Everyone was wary of Toothless now, some of them going so far as to move to the farthest wall.

"I-I... dunno, Hiccup... maybe the Headmaster is right...". Said Anna, looking away.

"One... must not underestimate wild beasts, mate.", said Aster, scratching the back of his head.

"You better keep that dragon in a cage, fishbone!", yelled Snotlout behind a pillar.

I couldn't believe it... in one single swoop Monobear had... destroyed a bond of trust once again.

"Well, since Hiccy's rambunctious pet destroyed the classroom, you're all excused for now!", giggled Monobear with a cheeriness unbecoming the storm of emotions inside me. "I hope to see you all again tomorrow... but I wonder... if you'll even make it? Ahahahahahahaha!"

Everyone but Jack left as fast as their hunger-hindered bodies allowed them to go, wary of the dragon who was looking miserable next to me.

North's hulking form was the last to leave, hesitating on the Great Hall's exit. Finally, the Ultimate Sculptor's turned to face me and with a solemn look on his face, he spoke: "I am sorry, Hiccup. I really am. But if you cannot keep your friend in place, then I must ask you to not help in our search anymore. It is far too dangerous to have a wild beast hanging around us. I promised I would not let victim happen; I intend to keep that promise, no matter the cost."

And without waiting for me to answer, he turned his back to me and left.

This... this was unfair. Incredibly unfair and it hurt, to be distrusted. It... it wasn't our fault, so why?! Why...

Memories of me being alone and avoided because I was a failure... because I never do things right... those kinds of memories filled my heart... and I truly felt... like I was drowning in despair.

Of course no one would hang around a failure like me. I always mess things up. I... had the trust of others?

...Hah... that was a lie. I wasn't trustworthy at all. And... I didn't deserve that trust. So of course I was going to mess up eventually, Ultimate Good Luck be damned. That was my destiny... to screw everything up and end up alone...

When Jack finally released me from his hug, I collapsed on the floor.

...There was no motivation anymore. Why would I even... care about finding a way out? There was no way a failure like me would ever find it... and I had resolved to die already, so why did I even bother...? It was much better... much better to just give up... that's right...

I closed my eyes, ignoring Jack's concerned voice as he shook my pathetic, skinny and useless body. I never... understood why he would even bother with me, but I guess in the end it doesn't matter anyway.

...He'll surely be happy without me anyways... He won't have to look out for me... he'll never get hurt anymore for my sake... yeah, he'll finally be free of Hiccup Haddock, the Ultimate Useless.

And fully believing that (and yet, why do I feel slightly sad at the

fact that he'll be happy without me...?) I gave up. I let my consciousness fade away into a cold darkness, so inviting and promising me escape and relief.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I never had been so scared in my life than when Toothless went berserk. Seeing a beast like that acting how I assumed dragons normally behaved was really disturbing. Despite how tired and light-headed I was, the daze on my brain lifted as my instincts kicked in and I decided to focus on my survival.

However, the fear I felt during that was minuscule compared to the terror I sensed when I saw Toothless advance on Hic.

Thanks to North's support, I was able to save the little Viking from harm.

But even though he was saved... Even as I checked his small body for injuries... and even though I found none, I couldn't feel relief.

Because Hic's expression as he saw everyone turn away from Toothless with fear worried me. It was a natural reaction, to fear a dangerous beast... but I could see how this was affecting Hic.

And I didn't like it.

He was looking worse than after the Class Trial. And that... I felt as if my heart was being squeezed. I didn't want to see Hic like this. I wanted to see the bright, sarcastic, witty boy, not this empty husk...

All of that, however, paled in comparison to the fear I felt when Hic passed out in my arms.

Even Toothless, who was keeping his distance out of shame for his actions, immediately rushed to our side. And rightly so. Hic... wasn't looking so good these past days. Everyone was suffering from hunger but the little Viking was noticeably weaker and skinnier and it had honestly surprised me he had lasted so long. He really was strong... and yet now...

No matter how much I shook him...! No matter how frantically I called his name...!

No matter how much I prayed to the gods as I embraced him tightly...!

He wasn't waking up... I could still feel his heart beat but... He really wasn't going to last longer...

Will he... is he going to...?

...No! I refuse to... I'm not going to let him die... not before I get to say to him that I...!

"I... I love you..."

The raging storm outside drowns out my whispered confession. Haha... the only way I could tell him was when he couldn't hear me... I really am a coward.

But I want to... tell him when he gets better. Because I refuse to give up on Hic. He... just needs to rest, right? Right...

Deciding that this room isn't good enough, and with Toothless' help, I carry the little Viking's body towards the hotel, shielding his lithe frame from the cold as much as I can.

\* \* \*

><p>Despite my grandiose declaration, my hunger is too much for me and even Toothless. We're too tired to get to Hiccup's room on the fourth floor so I decide to go with the best option we have. I take the little Viking to my room.<p>

Toothless enters my room as soon as I open the door and he beelines straight to the bed, the only piece of furniture Monobear provided me, and sets down the Ultimate Lucky Student with a gentleness that you'd never thought you would see from a dragon, much less after seeing how he acted back at the Great Hall. But I know Toothless didn't mean any real harm, and so, I approach the small Viking without any fear of the Night Fury who is looking at him with palpable worry.

Hic's still out cold and isn't moving. I can't help but to grow even more worried. But there is nothing that can be done. There is no food here to alleviate his hunger and I don't know any way to treat him. All I can do is... let him rest and wait.

Cursing my inability to help and my uselessness, I decide to just look over Hic as he sleeps calmly, his breathing quiet and his chest rising slowly.

...But... you know... I feel kinda tired... and dizzy...

Maybe... I should... just lie down... take a nap... Yeah, that sounds... Nice.

...

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Darkness. It's all I can see or hear or sense. A murky abyss spreads in front of me and no matter where I look or how much I struggle, the darkness never recedes.

I start to wonder whether I'll be trapped forever in this quiet.

Suddenly, a loud, intruding noise pierces through the dark and I'm awakened from my unconscious with a jolt.

What... where...? Where am I...?

I don't recognize this room as I take in every detail. It has a similar aesthetic to the Cruddy Room I sleep in but its in much better condition than that place. There is no drafts here, and the light fixture isn't dangling precariously near the floor... plus, the bed I am sleeping is an actual bed and not some flimsy sleeping bag and-

Wait a second... a bed?

I'm in a bed?

And this... what is this heavy thing over my chest? Why am I so warm and why can't I move? I feel like I'm being held in this bed by someone-

Slowly, I turn my head to my right and what I see makes my blood rush to my cheeks. Because next to me, sleeping soundly and without a care in the world, is the Ultimate White Haired Idiot, Jackson Overland. Yeah, he's sleeping happily, alright! That dumb goofy smile of his as he keeps hugging me is a telling sign.

Okay... what the Hel is going?! How did I end here?! I was in the Great Hall, enduring Monobear's lesson and...!

Oh yeah.

My embarrassment at the current situation is replaced slowly by despair.

Right... Toothless, my bud, snapped. He tried to eat... to kill us all... And...

Jack and North saved me and the others.

But even though I wasn't harmed, there was some damage done. On the aftermath of the attack... everyone stared at Toothless with distrust... and fear. As if he were a dangerous animal, not a gentle, smart creature worthy of respect or admiration...

And yet, even though I was being excluded by association from the group... Why?

Why was I in what I assumed was Jack's room?

Why would he even care about me after all that? Why did he look after me after everything that happened?

Why is he looking so... happy as he hugs me?

Why did I even end up here?!

All of my questions are answered in an unpredictable manner, as a certain Night Fury decides to assault my face with a frontal tongue attack.

"Ack...! Toothless...! No! S-stop! You...! You know that doesn't wash out! Mpght!", is all I can say as the obviously worried Night Fury continues its affectionate assault. In the end, no matter how much I struggled around, I ended up covered in what I estimate to be about 10 liters of dragon spit.



Oh well... at least Toothless does care about me still... and if he doing this makes him calm, then there's no reason for me to stop that, right?

And besides, Toothless doing this DID have a positive side-effect...

"Eugh... What... is this?"

To my right, I can hear a disgruntled Jack as he slowly wakes up , realization striking him fully as he groans and shakes off the globs of dragon saliva that managed to get on him. I can't help but snicker at the sight, and the sound quickly wakes up Jack, his eyes opening wide as he sees me awake.

"Uh... good morning, sleeping beauty...?", I try warily, not sure what to make of Jack's dumbfounded expression as he stares at me for what it feels like hours, his blue eyes piercing me intently as if he hadn't seen me in a long while.

Suddenly, that moment of stillness is broken by the whitette, as he hugs me tightly before letting me go as suddenly as he embraced me. Soon enough, a flustered looking Jack started rambling on and on as he gestured his hands wildly.

"Oh my god...! You're... you're OK Hic! You... I was so worried! I...!", Jack ran a hand through his forehead while he paused. "I didn't know what to do when you fainted...! I really, REALLY was fucking scared, you know?! I had no idea what to do and I was so worried that you weren't going to wake up...!"

It really was a sight to behold. I had never seen Jack act like this. And yet, I could feel the sincerity behind his words.

I only half-listened to his ramble as I thought about this... With this, I couldn't doubt him anymore. He really... wears his heart on his sleeve, huh? He has never deceived me or treated me badly... and he's always looking after me, despite all the troubles I surely cause him...

"I'm... I'm just so glad you're awake now.", finished the Ultimate Mystery, looking embarrassed but above all, relieved.

And because of that, I couldn't help but to fall in love even more with this awkward, worrywart of a dork.

The Gods must really hate me.

"Oh... um...", was all I could say in response to his outburst at first. I didn't know how to express the gratefulness I was feeling towards him right now. Still, I had to try. "T-thank you, Jackson... really, thank you! I don't know what happened but I'm, uh, glad you took care of me."

Jack chuckled at my awkward thanks, his smile only growing bigger as he looked at me fumble out my reply. "Don't mention it, Hic. That's... what friends are for."

Even though it only showed for one second, I could tell he had

hesitated a bit at the last part of his sentence.

'That's what friends are for'â€¦ Huh.

Suddenly my resolve from yesterday returned. These past occurrences where our lives almost ended only made me more resolute. Before anything else happens... before we go beyond the point of no return... I have to tell him. I'm going to do it... right now.

"But man, you calling me Jackson, Hic... it's kinda weird, y'know? After all, that is my brother's name... Mine's actually Jack! Can you believe that?", says an oblivious Jack as he rambles on happily, ignoring my focused expression and me taking a deep breath in order to psyche myself.

This is it, Haddock.

You have to say what you've been dreading to say since you realized that you got a crush on this idiot. This kind, thoughtful, witty, prankster, and a bit childish but nonetheless caring idiot.

...Gods, this is harder than I thought!

"Uh, Jack?"

OK, my voice came out as a squeak... that was definitely not the tone I was going for! Still, that's enough to stop the white-haired idiot's prattling, whose expression changes from one of happiness to one of concern as he looks at me.

...I wonder what kind of face I'm making right now. Does it look as bad as I feel? Because I feel like I want to die. Not literally, but argh! I need to focus!

"Yeah, Hic? Are you alright?", asks Jack worried, "Does... does it hurt somewhere?"

I sigh. Please, brain, don't fail me now. "N-no! I'm alright Jack, it's just...! I have to tell you, uh... something!"

OK, so far so good. Can I take a 5 minute break? No? Didn't think so...

Jack simply raises an eyebrow, looking at me with a confused expression. "Well, I'm all ears, Hic. What is it?"

That's the golden question. Gods, how do I even say this?! "Hey Jack, so I've been like, crushing on you very hard and well, I dunno, you probably think I'm too much of a loser to even consider this but would you mind going out with me?"

...Yeah, no, I can already see how much of a disaster this would be if I actually said that!

Still, I've come so far... and I might never get a chance to say it so...!

"Ah, well, you see...", I say as I rub my arm nervously, "There is something I've been wanting to tell you... uh, a while... ago! Yeah!"

Jack's expression changes from one of worry to one of expectancy.  
"...And, that is...?"

OK, Haddock... don't mess this up! This... this will be a cinch!  
Piece of cake. Nothing to it. It will be alright. Everything will be  
aaaaall and I can't do this!

No, but I can't back down! Come on! Just. One. Sentence. That's  
all!

"Well, you see, Jack, uh... the thing I've been wanting to tell you  
is that, I... uh... I kinda have a cru-"

Truly, I must be the Ultimate Unlucky Student in reality, for in that  
moment, and with a horribly precise timing, a loud noise resounded  
throughout the whole hotel. It sounded like something heavy had  
fallen.

I bet Loki is laughing it up somewhere. What a rotten timing! Really,  
why would a loud noise interrupt me from-

Wait... a loud noise...? Wasn't I awakened by a loud noise too? And  
just what was that loud noise from before? Does it have anything to  
do with the one we heard just now?

"Geez, who's making such a racket at such ungodly hours of the  
night?", complained Jack, our conversation all but forgotten. Well, I  
can't say I am not disappointed, but I must admit I am kinda curious  
as to what that noise was.

Wait... ungodly hours of the night? What time is it, anyways?

To answer my own question, I silently take out my ElectroID  
and...

"Oh crap!"

I unintentionally swear as I see the time displayed on the  
screen.

7:30 AM.

We completely missed Monobear's lesson.

So... was that noise...? No, he couldn't have... he couldn't have  
punished someone just because we missed the lesson... right?

"We have to find out what that noise was."

"Huh? Oh, sure...!"

Fear motivates me to speak bluntly, and Jack quickly catches on to  
what I mean. Soon enough, the whitette, Toothless and I are on the  
move already, exiting Jack's room and descending the odd building's  
stairs. As we enter the hotel's lobby, though, we find that we aren't  
the only ones present on the room. Then again, it would be odd if no  
one heard the noise and came to investigate... it was really  
loud!

Merida, Tooth, Rapunzel, Aster, Flynn, Fishlegs, and the Twins were present in the lobby, looking at our arrival with... relief? Were they actually worried about us?

"Oh... so you guys are alright!", said Tooth, her expression brightening as she ran over to us and hugged us both.

"Did you guys hear the noise too?", asked Fishlegs.

'Yeah.', answered Jack as he nodded. "What in the world was that?"

"I dunno, kiddo.". replied Flynn with a shrug. "But man, was it loud! It woke me up real good!"

"Do you think Monobear is behind this?", asked Tooth as she looked at each of us with a worried expression.

"Would be the only thing that makes sense... I mean, we DID miss his lesson, after all.", said Merida as she crossed her arms.

"Huh... Guess we weren't the only ones that overslept..." I mumbled.

"Give us a break, Hiccup.", moaned Tuff, "We were too tired!"

"Speaking of oversleeping... where IS everyone?". asked Rapunzel, looking expectantly at the stairs. Yeah, that was odd... where was everyone?

"Ah well, we can't wait for 'em too long." said Aster suddenly. "We need to find out what that noise was, right? Somethin' tells me the Headmaster is up to somethin' so we should probably go to the Great Hall and see what's his deal."

I had to agree, somewhat. Such a loud and unnatural noise... there was no way Monobear wasn't involved. But what did that noise mean? Could it have something to do with us not being present for Monobear's class? Or is it something else...?

"W-will we be alright?", asked Fishlegs, his voice shaky with fear.

"Relax, Fish! Everythin's gonna be alrigh'!", said Merida as she patted the Ultimate Encyclopedia hard on the back.

"It really is the only thing we can do.", said Jack, looking pensive. "Who knows... maybe that noise has something to do with our escape route!"

"That's waaay too convenient, you idiot.", said Flynn, shaking his head disapprovingly.

"But Jack is kinda correct. So... uh, shall we go check out the Great Hall, then?", I replied.

And with that, our group composed of students and a dragon marched on towards the Great Hall. I really hoped nothing bad was going to happen because we ditched class, but this noise had Monobear written

all over it so I didn't get my hopes up.

\* \* \*

><p>Honestly, the fact that we could even move right now was a miracle by itself. But our need to know what was going on propelled us forward.<p>

It took us considerably longer to reach the Great Hall from the hotel than during our first day here, but that was because we were famished, sleep-deprived and cold.

Our situation was quite dire. We didn't even know if we would even wake up to live another day.

But despite all that, and despite all the troubles and distrust between us, we ended up in the middle of a light-hearted scene as we made our way to the appointed place.

"I'm telling you, Hic can totally snowboard like... like someone REALLY good at snowboarding!" said a certain whitette, looking incredibly proud.

Jack had decided to bring this up when Flynn started to talk about how he was really good at skiing and of course, the Ultimate Mystery just couldn't resist the urge to gloat.

Too bad he had decided to gloat about me, And now everyone was looking at me weird.

"I can vouch for that! I saw 'im snowboard and he wasn't half bad!"

Wow, thanks for encouraging Jack, Merida! Really loving being the center of attention here. Not.

"Who would've thought...", whispered Flynn.

"Dragon tamer and snowboarder?! Is there anything you can't do, Hiccup?!", shouted Fishlegs excitedly.

"Uh, it's... its not that big of a deal, really!", I tried my best to get the spotlight away from me. I DIDN'T enjoy this... being the center of attention meant everyone was looking at you and thus everyone would see when you mess up! And the least I need is people seeing my mistakes.

"Nonsense, ankle-biter. The fact that someone as scrawny as you can actually ride down a slope without breakin' is a very big deal."

Gee, Aster... "You, uh... Really, have a way with words, Aster!" I said sarcastically and everyone laughed at my comment, the Ultimate Survivalist ruffling my hair in retaliation.

This was totally not the time to act like this. And yet.

And yet, I didn't mind. Because I was having fun. Uncomfortably having fun, yes, but fun nonetheless. Having people in your age group... and hanging out with them... It really was great.

A smile spread on my lips as we continued to joke around, and soon enough we were in front of the doors of the Great Hall.

Because of the jolly atmosphere our group had, we had forgotten all our worries about that noise and Monobear's lesson and possible retaliation.

And that was a mistake.

I carelessly opened the door, and looked inside the Great Hall with a smile as I laughed at a joke Ruffnut told that I can't remember anymore.

And as I processed what I saw right there, my smile faded completely.

Something that shouldn't have happened. Something that didn't belong here, in this place, in our happy atmosphere, laid right there in the middle of the Great Hall, covered in glass shards, wood splinters and caked in a crimson liquid.

That something... That something with a terrified expression frozen on its face... That something with three gaping wounds on the chest... That something was the lifeless body of the Ultimate Sculptor, Nicholas St. North.

**\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Normal Days END\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>:^)<strong>

**\*\*It took forever to get here, and I do apologize for that, but we're getting somewhere again!\*\***

**\*\*There isn't much to be said right now, so please sit tight and let me drive this wild ride that is called "actual plot developments holy shit".\*\***

**\*\*Until next time!\*\***

## 23. 2 - Chapter 2 - (ab)Normal Days A

**\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - (ab)Normal Lives A\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Transition chapter, ho! There's not much to say here, only that. Enjoy!<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

"Why...?"

As I processed the gruesome scene in front of me, a single question left my lips.

Why? Why was... North dead? How can he be dead?

Did... does this mean? Did it happen again? Did someone kill...?

I thought we had made a promise... I thought we wouldn't have to deal with this ever again. But it had happened. Someone decided to put us through this hell once again. Once again, we were thrown in this terrible situation.

Why...?!

"What the hell?!"

"Oi, mate... you can't be serious..."

Jack's and Aster's voice snapped me out from my dazed state of mind as they walked to stand next to me, their faces displaying horror and disgust.

Soon after, Tooth's terrified scream followed as she witnessed the corpse of our departed friend. However, even that scream was drowned out by a bell and the odious voice of our Headmaster, whose cheerful tone completely ignored the grim scene that was occurring in front of us.

\*\*\*Ding dong ding dong\*\*\*

"A body has been discovered in the Great Hall! Following a short period of investigation, the Class Trial will begin!"

The announcement rang on one of the monitors inside of the Great Hall, which turned off as soon as it business was done.

The rest of our group filed in and the only thing they could do was stare.

Nicholas St. North... He was a large man, imposing both in personality and appearance. However, at his center laid a very jolly, curious and responsible person. He was so committed towards us that he even made outrageous promises. But even though we knew they were outrageous, we believed in him and his words because he exuded leadership; we somehow knew we could trust him.

A person like this... someone who had been working towards getting us out of here safely...

I couldn't believe someone killed a guy like him. It seemed... impossible and downright cruel.

I didn't know how many minutes had passed since Monobear's announcement, but as we continued to stare at our deceased friend's body, Anna, Elsa, Peter and Snotlout came into the room running, their eyes going wide as they saw North's corpse.

"What the hell...!"

"Oh no..."

Snotlout and Anna only expressed their shock as they saw the body,

their faces going distinctly pale.

"I can't believe this is happening again..."

"To think that things had to come to this... how unfortunate..."

Elsa and Peter both grimaced at the sight. They tried hard to hide their discomfort but it showed despite their efforts.

"Unfortunate? Oh, no no no! I say its quite the opposite!"

That cartoony, carefree voice filled the room as the Headmaster popped out in front of us, looking extremely happy.

"I mean, I was getting so dreadfully bored, you know? So for me, the fact that someone finally died is quite good! This means that we'll finally be able to get this show on the road! Puhuhuhu!"

Tooth's face went even more pale at the Headmaster's declaration. "Show...? Do you mean...?"

"Of course I mean the Class Trial. silly!", shouted Monobear jovially, "I mean, those are the rules! If a student kills someone, we hold a Class Trial! Don't tell me you forgot, Toothy!"

"So... someone really did kill Nick...?", said Jack in a breathless tone.

"Duh!", answered Monobear, looking annoyed at the whitette. "Of course he got offed by one of you guys. What, did you think I broke the rules and offed him myself? Don't be stupid... or well, more stupid than usual, Frosty."

Jack clenched his jaw and looked away. The Headmaster continued on, unperturbed by Jack's clear show of anger.

"In any case, you guys need to get on with the investigation! And that is why I came here!", said Monobear as he pulled out a set familiar looking devices.

"Today, I have two gifts for you in this investigation! First, we have the Monobear File!", and after saying that, the Headmaster put one of each in our reluctant hands. "This is La Segunda which is french for second! Or something like that! Nyohoho!"

I pocketed mine quickly, not really wanting to see the details of my friend's death just yet. I was still reeling from all of this.

We all made a promise... we all knew the consequences of killing... we've all gone through that harrowing experience... so why? Why did someone kill North?

I couldn't understand it, no matter how much I thought about it.

"My other gift is...!", said Monobear with a dramatic pause as he walked behind a pillar. A few seconds after, the monochrome bear came back with a picnic basket, "PB&J sandwiches and milk!"

We all stared at the bear with a dumbfounded expression. Monobear



took our silence as a cue for a tirade.

"It wouldn't do me any good if you guys collapsed from hunger right in the middle of the Class Trial, so I figured you guys needed some nourishment. After all... you fulfilled your end of the bargain, so might as well give you your reward, don't you think? Fair is fair after all! Puhuhuhu!"

Anger boiled inside me.

I didn't want this food. Well... I did want it... but having to eat it at the sake of another person's life? That didn't sit well with me at all!

And yet, despite how I hated to admit it... Monobear was right. I needed energy. Nourishment. If I wanted to find out the truth, I had to eat. Collapsing right now was something I didn't want to.

Which is why I felt so terrible about this.

But I had to soldier on. I was doing this for North's sake... and for everyone's sake. I wordlessly approached the basket Monobear offered us and took my sandwich and milk. Soon after, everyone followed suit and proceeded to eat the food the Headmaster had offered us.

The food was gone in less than 5 minutes.

I felt more alive than ever. A weird sense of resolution grew inside of me; one born from having to survive at the cost of a friend's life. That's right... in a way, North had given us this food. We can use this... to find his killer.

That... was the only way I could cope with all of this.

Once we finished eating, the Headmaster continued without waiting any longer. "Okaaaay! Seems you guys are all fueled up! I hope you perform well on the Class Trial! Do your beeeest!"

Unceremoniously, he disappeared and he left us with this weird sense of emptiness. And a task we didn't want to do. But that had to be done.

For the sake of our survival... we had to investigate this crime. We had to go back to those days of distrust.

"So, uh..."

Tuffnut's voice broke the silence left by the Headmaster.

"Do we, uh... have to investigate again?", said Ruffnut, finishing his brother's silence.

"Do we really have to go through this once more...?", said Rapunzel, her voice barely a strained whisper.

"Yeah...", said Jack as he nodded, gulping visually as he stared at North's corpse with a pained expression, "We have to if we want to live... besides, I want to know who is the bastard who killed Nick..."

"Way ahead of ya, mate."

Aster's voice caught my attention. When I looked at the Ultimate Survivalist, he was circling the ex-Ultimate Sculptor's body with a trained gaze. He suddenly jabbed one finger at North's arms, and then he spoke with a grave look on his face:

"These wounds... I can tell who the killer is just by lookin' at 'em."

The eerie silence left by Aster's words was broken by Fishlegs.

"What?! REALLY?!"

"Whoa, way to go, man!", shouted Flynn, looking impressed. I, on the other hand, was more curious about Aster's deduction. How did he figure out who the culprit was so easily...?

"Who is our culprit, Mr. Bunnymund?", asked Elsa with an expressionless mask.

The silver-haired youth grimaced as he looked all over us. The room got charged with a tense atmosphere; one that would explode whenever Aster spoke.

And when he did, my whole world felt as if it had been blown to pieces.

"The only one who could have done it, I'm afraid, is that bloody beast Toothless."

"..."

"...What...?"

That was all I could muster. I... I didn't misheard that, right?

No... no way.

The look on Aster's face... how he avoided my gaze...

No... he really DID say that... But...

"What the hell? You just... no! Look, see, that... definitely! Makes zero sense!" I was tripping on my own words, my brain having trouble with keeping up with my thoughts. I was simply expressing my own disbelief.

Because... there was no way I'd believe that! Toothless would never...!

"Hmm... interesting...", said Peter as he rubbed his chin thoughtfully, "Might I ask what is the basis of your claim?"

"You better have a good reason, Bunny, because you just can't fucking accuse Hic's friend like that!", said Jack, as he glared daggers at the Ultimate Survivalist, who didn't look fazed at all by the whitette's attitude.

"The wounds on North's body.", said Aster as he looked at Peter, "I ain't no expert on dragons, but these wounds...", he trailed off as he looked at North's corpse, "I've seen enough people slaughtered by wild beasts in my time... and these are definitely wounds done by an animal alright."

I took a closer look at the part Aster was pointing, pushing past the other students and when I saw North's arms and legs, I couldn't believe what I saw.

No matter how much I denied it, those were definitely bite and scratch marks, tearing through both fabric and flesh, on the Ultimate Sculptor's body.

I... couldn't believe this.

And yet denying the truth in front of me was dangerous... but... then, what should I do? What reality should I accept? Should I believe what I see in front of me? Or should I believe in my bud?

I could hear people's whispers behind my back as I thought this.

"W-well... that dragon did try to eat us once, right?", said Anna nervously.

"A-and... even if he is a wild beast... dragons are smart, right? And North had been mean to him recently when he prohibited his participation on the search, no?", muttered Fishlegs.

"I see... so you're saying the dragon has a motive...", commented Flynn.

...

I gritted my teeth. No... this wasn't right... what was I thinking?

How could I... even start to doubt Toothless?

I turned around and looked at my scaled friend. I could see it in his eyes. We'd been through a lot together. He'd always supported me no matter the circumstances. He never left my side even when everyone in Berk did whenever I messed up. He was always there.

How could I... doubt someone so loyal? I really was the Ultimate Fool.

"T-there's no way Toothless killed North!", I yelled at the whispering trio, who recoiled with surprise.

Aster looked taken aback, but he regained his composure. "I'm sorry ankle-biter... but there's no mistakin' it... the wounds..."

I looked at North's corpse with difficulty. Aster was right. Those wounds on North's body were undeniably not human. And yet... there had to be an explanation...

"It's too early to pass judgement!", I offered. "We haven't even

investigated yet! So, we... cannot just decide like this, OK?! We have to investigate first!"

"Look, kiddo," began Flynn, looking mildly annoyed. "Aster's not wrong. It's damn obvious your lizard did it!"

I was ready to argue back when a voice I didn't expect to hear came to my aid.

"Wow, you are dumber than I thought."

I turned around to see Snotlout looking at the Ultimate Thief with an annoyed expression, arms crossed.

"We have been through this before, you idiot. We can't just jump to conclusions. Our lives are at fucking stake here; we have to get this investigation crap done and do this right correctly."

Everyone, including myself, was stunned. I mean, yeah, Snotlout was right, he was absolutely right. We couldn't just point fingers without making sure our deductions were correct. It was just the fact that Snotlout had said it... and the fact that he had stood up for me... yeah, it WAS incredibly surprising.

Did he feel this way because of his previous experience with the Class Trial? Everyone thought he had done it at the time, and it was only because Jack and I had investigated that we cleared his name. Was he trying to return the favor...? I stared at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter with a mix of gratitude and disbelief.

The beefy boy blushed at the constant stares and continued silence, and shouted flustered. "D-don't get the wrong idea, you idiots. I-I'm not doing it because I like this fishbone and its fucking gecko", at this point he turned away from me, "I'm only doing it to save my own skin, got it?! I don't want to fucking die or anything..."

I smiled. Snotlout was still a jerk but... I... was grateful.

"Thanks, Snotlout." I said, sincerely.

"W-whatever..."

"I can't believe Snotlout is right again...", said Merida, looking embarrassed, her expression changing to one of determination all of a sudden after a nod. "Well, what are we waitin' for?! We better get crackin' and find who North's real killer is!"

Aster sighed. "Fine, whatever.", he shook his head, "But I'm tellin' ya, that beast is the one who did the big fella in." He said as he pointed at the Night Fury, who visibly flinched and actually was looking smaller than ever as everyone stared at him with fear and distrust.

"That has not been decided yet.", declared Elsa. "Well then... shall we go look for clues, Anna?"

"Err... yeah...", answered the Ultimate Hiker, looking between me and Toothless with an expression I could only describe as hesitant. I will never understand that girl.

Slowly, everyone started to walk away from the crime scene, their steps unsure and slow. Their heart wasn't on the investigation, I could tell. Most of them... really did believe Toothless was the killer.

"This just feels like a waste of time...", I heard Flynn say as he followed Rapunzel outside the Great Hall.

"Animals h-have been documented to lose control after all... so a dragon killing someone is extremely likely...", mumbled Fishlegs as he walked away.

...

...

I... need to ignore those comments and focus.

In the end, the only ones that were left in the room were Jack and Peter... and North.

But then again... North... he wasn't really with us anymore.

It was weird. You'd think after seeing two people die, in such a quick succession, you'd get used to death. But it wasn't like that. Actually, getting used to seeing people die... would be quite worrisome.

I really... didn't want to get used to something like this, either. But for now, we had to do this...

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

"Geez... what the hell is wrong with them...", I said as I glared at the door where everyone left to. "How can they suspect Toothless...?"

I really couldn't believe this.

Well, there were a lot of things I couldn't believe about this situation, but the one I was referring to was these guys' treatment of Toothless. Why couldn't they believe in Hic's words?

Then again... this was Monobear's aim. He wanted to spread despair among us, and using distrust as a catalyst was certainly something the Headmaster would do.

But I believe in Hic. And I certainly was fond of Toothless too (despite his attitude). So the Headmaster had to do better if he wanted to make me doubt the overgrown lizard.

Still, this... was a very confusing and messed up situation.

Who would kill Nick? He wasn't doing anything wrong. In fact, he was the one who was rallying us in order to escape. Why kill someone like that? Why kill someone who was obviously trying to help us?

"Really, I'm surprised you don't suspect him...", said Pitch who for some reason decided to stay in the room with us. "You must really trust your companion...", said the Ultimate Fear Expert at the little Viking who looked at him with a determined expression.

"Of course I do." was all he said, before going into a contemplative state.

I smiled to myself, mostly because of Hic's resolution. I'm glad he still believes, despite the atmosphere.

And it goes without saying that I believe in the Night Fury's innocence too.

...That doesn't mean I have an idea of Nick's true killer, though.

"Who... could have possibly killed Nick...?", I said out loud as I crossed my arms.

"Hmph... don't think TOO hard, you phony. You might end up frying your small brain.", jeered Pitch, and I suddenly found myself hoping that he was the killer.

"Well, whoever was the killer... was certainly bold." continued the Ultimate Fear Expert, his oddly yellow eyes focusing on Hic, as if he was expecting something, "I mean, to try to kill someone as imposing as North while also being weak from hunger and while being confined here... It almost sounds like an impossible crime, no?"

I hated to admit it, but it did sound unfeasible for a person.

Still, that didn't deter the little viking from thinking. And think he did, for he stayed silent for a long time until suddenly...

"Ah...! Could it be...?"

The Ultimate Lucky Student shouted as if he had deduced something, his face full of surprise. I was hoping he was going to share with us but instead, the auburn-haired kid turned away and started to walk away from us, leaving us very confused.

I, of course, immediately gave chase. Seizing him by the arm, I turned him around to face me. "Whoa, there, Hic! Where are you going?"

Hic blinked as if he were waking up from a trance. "Oh... I'm going to the Final Dead Room."

...

"What?!"

I definitely heard Hic say that but... I couldn't understand what I was hearing. "Hic, are you crazy?! Why do you even want to go there?!"

Said Viking roughly pulled his arm away from my grip, his face full

of determination. "Because the answers to this murder's mysteries are there, Jack."

"What the hell are you talking about?!", I shouted back. "How did you even reach THAT conclusion?"

A sigh escaped the little Viking's lips, followed by a facepalm. "Look, it's obvious that Toothless is NOT the killer, right?". I nodded to answer his question.

"So, the killer must be human... and if the killer is human, they must have used a weapon to kill North, right?", continued Hic. Yeah, that's... kinda obvious... but I didn't talk and instead nodded to see where Hic was going with this.

"Right, but... We've been trapped here without anything on ourselves but our ElectroIDs... so the question is: Where did they even get a murder weapon if we couldn't leave this place?"

...

Oh! I see... I get it.

Yeah, Monobear DID say something about it.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"This room is definitely not for the faint of heart! Any of you who enters this room will be tossed into a glorious game of Life and Death! You either come out of it a winner or in a casket! And if you mortals somehow manage to win... then you'll be able to claim your reward! A weapon suited perfectly for Mutual Killing! Sweet, huh?"<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Yeah... I see... it makes sense...<p>

But that still doesn't mean I approve of this decision! I tighten my grip on Hic's arm and look at him dead in the eye. "OK... the killer may have gotten the weapon from the Final Death Room... but that doesn't mean you have to go there! It's dangerous, Hic!"

Instead of being dissuaded, the Ultimate Lucky Student's face hardened, pulling his arm free from my grip with a strength I didn't know he had.

"In case you didn't notice, Jack, we are already in a dangerous situation!", he said as he gestured to the entire room.

"Yes, but that doesn't mean its alright to go looking for more danger, Hic!", I retorted, growing angry at the show of recklessness Hic was showing.

"Jack, the answers to the mystery behind North's death are there! I can feel it! That's why I HAVE to go!", shouted the little Viking, looking impatient and visibly irritated.

"I agree with Haddock.", said Pitch but I was so not in the mood for this. How could he just agree like that?! Wasn't he worried about

Hiccup's life? There was no way in hell I would agree with Hic's decision! For all we know, it could be a trap from the Headmaster!

"No, Hic, listen to yo-, are you even hearing what you're saying?! There's a reason the Final Dead Room is named that way! Monobear said you could die!". I didn't want to argue with him like this, but if there was something I've learned about Hiccup is the fact that he's stubborn as hell.

The brunette simply clenched his fists and moved them to his side, looking away from me. "I don't care, Jack. I'm doing this for Toothless. Monobear can do whatever he wants; I'm going there and that is final."

...I knew it. He was dead set on going. There were so many wrong things with this. I was supposed to be the reckless idiot of the two and yet here he was, risking his life thoughtlessly! Still, I could see it on his green eyes, burning with determination... he wasn't going to back down.

"...Fine... at least let me go with you.", I mumbled with a sigh. If I couldn't stop him from going, I should at least go with him. I would do anything in my power to protect the little viking from harm.

"No."

...Wait what?

"What do you mean, 'no'?". I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"I... I meant what I said. We can't go together, Jack.", as he said this, Hic looked at me with... regret?, "The Final Dead Room only allows one person at a time. That's why I have to go alone..."

He truly looked sorry. I guess he really wanted me to come with him. But Monobear's rules were absolute. If we broke them, we might end up dead before we even set foot in the Final Dead Room. With a reluctant sigh, I let go of Hic's arm and cross mine, giving him a stern look.

"Do you want me to go to the Final Dead Room in your place?", I offered. Honestly, I'm not that confident on my ability to survive the Room's tricks, but I'd rather Hic not face any unnecessary danger.

To no one's surprise, the little Viking shakes his head in denial. "Uh... no, I'll do it Jack. B-Besides... I need you to do me a favor..."

Huh?

"Y-you see... You're the only one who trusts me and Toothless right now so... you're the only one I can ask...? I-Yeah...! That sounds about right". An awkward chuckle, and more nervous rubbing of his arm accompanies his oddly structured sentence. Despite that, I can understand what he's trying to say. I guess I've spent enough time with Hic to understand his mannerisms.



"What is it, Hic?". I ask, curious. While its true that I am probably the only being in this camp that fully trusts Hic, I don't see how I can help...

"You see... I need you to investigate here while I'm in the Final Dead Room. We need to, uh, go about this efficiently, after all! We don't know how much time we even have, so!", with a look that could only be described as pleading, he blurted out, "C-can you do that for me, Jack? Can you investigate here?"

I snorted. What was he so nervous for? "Psh, Hic, do you even need to ask? It's not like I was going to just stand still here. Don't worry, I'll definitely try to find clues about Nick's killer."

Yeah, I wasn't going to let Nick's death go unpunished. Not only did they put all of us in a dangerous spot, killing a nice guy like Nick was unforgivable.

Hic nodded back with an embarrassed smile and then turned towards Toothless, who looked beyond worried and approached the viking with a concerned stare. The Ultimate Lucky Student greeted the worried dragon with a warm smile. "Don't worry bud. I'll clear your name." A freckled hand caressed the dragon's black, scaly head delicately, green eyes meeting with a meaningful glance. "I'll be back with proof of your innocence."

The Night Fury answered Hic with a soft headbutt and a lick. With a content laugh and some difficulty, the little Viking walked away from the dragon and after nodding at both me and Pitch, he quickly made his way out of the Great Hall.

...Was I really up to the task of investigating a body all by myself? Last time, I had help since Hic was with me...but now...

Well, I had to do my best. Compared to what Hic was going to do, I was better off. So I had to do this.

...Even if it meant having to endure everyone's patronizing gazes. Will I ever regain the trust of everyone else? Well, I guess I first must survive today's trial. And so, after steeling myself for the upcoming investigation, I walked back to where Nick's corpse was, ready to submerge myself in the scene of the crime, filled with the stench of death and blood.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

As I stand in front of the Final Dead Room's door, I start to wonder from where I got the courage to say the things I said to Jack back at the Great Hall.

Had the skull in the door always looked so intimidating? I am probably just imagining things.

...Argh, whatever! I have to do this...! Toothless' life, no... all of our lives are at risk here!

Wishing that my talent was Ultimate Final Dead Room Conqueror, I

pushed the door open and took a shaky step into the suspicious looking building, leaving the snow-covered Final Clearing behind.

What I saw inside was, to be honest, in line with the building's exterior.

The room's structure was simple. The room's four walls were stained with rust and a red substance similar to blood. These red stains spelled out different things.

"\*\*Ambidexterity\*\*". "\*\*The Tragedy\*\*". "\*\*Neo World Orde\*\*r." and "\*\*Hope Restoration Program\*\*" were all words and sentences I could make out in the walls, but as for their meaning? I didn't recognize any of these nor I had any idea what they were referring to. Aside from that, the room lacked any kind of fixture. It was eerily empty save for the door across the room, which was blocked off by exceptionally thick iron bars.

Still, despite the apparent lack of danger, I was on high alert. This was the Final Dead Room, after all. If Monobear was serious about his description of the room, then my life was in danger.

A noise behind my back makes me turn and gasp a little far too loud for my liking. A set of iron bars similar to the ones across the room now covers the door I used to enter. Great, now I am locked in on a death trap set by an animatronic bear.

...My life really took a turn for the strange, huh...

Mere seconds after that, a familiar figure pops up in the middle of the room, bearing an annoyingly smug grin.

Monobear.

"Huh? Hiccy?! Gasp! What are you doing here?! Are you finally ready to be killed to death?!", says the Headmaster, faking concern.

Right. The reason I came here for. Remembering that... yeah, now I can do this.

"I came here to challenge the Final Dead Room.", I answer as I try to look at the bear with as much defiance as I can.

The Headmaster simply snorts at the look in my face. Damn it... why am I so unintimidating?!

"Right-o! That's really the only reason behind you coming here! So Hiccy has decided to play with me after calling this room useless, huh...", Monobear's face suddenly turns slightly red with a blush. "N-not like I will change my view of you, i-idiot! D-do you take me for the kind of bear who likes getting mistreated by cute guys?!"

"I have absolutely no idea of what you're talking about.", I deadpan. I don't have time for this. "Just tell me what I need to do to win your ridiculous game!"

"My, my... so impatient.", and with a sigh, the Headmaster takes a step back. A whirring noise preludes the floor opening up right where

the bear was standing. From the ground rises a single pedestal with a plate containing six bullets and, mounted on a hanger, a single revolver.

"So! Here in the Final Dead Room I, Monobear, host a specifically tailored game of Life-and-Death for each one of you! No two people play the same game!", said the Headmaster as he spun around the pedestal.

I eye the gun with a sense of dread. A specifically tailored game for each one of us, huh...

"So... s-so what do you have planned for me?", I asked after contemplating the revolver.

"Puhuhuhu...", a menacing glare from the Headmaster's red eye accompanied his characteristic laugh. "Well, for Hiccy, our Ultimate Lucky Student... I prepared a rather simple but deadly game! See... all you have to do is put some bullets into the gun... spin the barrel, put the revolver to your head... and pull the trigger!"

Cold sweat started to run down my back.

"Yes, Hiccy... for the Ultimate Lucky Student... I'm going to challenge your luck to the limit with a nice, quick, simple game of Russian Roulette! You win if you survive... and you lose if you, well... you know... Puhuhuhu... Puhuhuhuhuhuhuhu!"

Yeaaaah... I know very well.

Suddenly the revolver looks extremely threatening. I've never held a gun in my life... I was already accident prone with swords and the like so naturally I stayed away from firearms as much as I could.

And now he's telling me that I have to purposefully put one to my head and hope for the best?

"By the way, Hiccy...", says the Headmaster as he gets fed up with my continued silence, "You cannot leave the room until the game has reached his conclusion... and the game will only reach its conclusion if you play it... so!", A pause. The Headmaster deftly climbs the pedestal and caresses the gun with a wicked grin. "I'd start getting acquainted with Mr. Revolver Ocelot if I were you! You guys do have a limited time for investigation after all..."

...Right...

I-I'm scared... unbelievably so. I knew this was going to be a dangerous thing, knowing the Headmaster...but I did promise my bud that I would return. S-so... so even though I have no talent at all, and even though my "talent" is shoddy at most and even though I'm sweating bullets and even though my arm is shaking as I take the revolver in my hands and I'm filled with so much fear right now...!

Even though all of that is going on right now on my mind... I... I have to do this. I have to beat the Final Dead Room.

The Headmaster hums as he sees me grip the gun tightly in my hand.

"Hmmm... hey, Hiccy? Mind if I tell you a little something?"

I wonder what he's up to...? I'm already playing a dangerous game... what else does he want me to do?

"Well, I was just going to say... you only really need to load a bullet in the barrel to clear the game buuuuut...", the Headmaster jumps off from the pedestal and walks away from it with his back turned away from me. "If you manage to clear the game with higher odds against you, as in with more bullets in the barrel, well... I guess I can reward you? How about it? Do you want to play for a better prize?"

My mind goes blank at this.

"I thought the only prize for winning the Final Dead Room was a weapon..."

"WRONG! It's the ULTIMATE weapon, Hiccy!", says the Headmaster as he suddenly spins to face me with a condescending grin, "Well, to be more precise... if you clear the Final Dead Room you're granted access to a special room past that door", explains Monobear as he points to the barred door across the room, "And in there, you'll find the weapon."

"Buuuut... I do have special rewards for those that manage to clear my Life-or-Death Game in higher difficulties! But its all up to you, Hiccy! Puhuhuhu..."

...

What do I do?

...Duh! I should just play the game at the most basic level! What are you thinking, Haddock?! You're already handicapped to begin with, and you had the gall to even think that you could clear this dangerous game at a higher difficulty?!

No. Absolutely not. You will not risk your life unnecessarily! Really, I thought I was more level-headed than this...!

So why in Thor's name am I loading two... three... \_four\_...? \_\*\*FIVE?!\*\_ bullets into the barrel like a fool?!

Because...

It's not because I'm confident in myself all of a sudden, that's for sure.

It's also not because I believe in my talent either.

I... I just... want to do whatever I can to help. I'm not expecting anything from Monobear's rewards... but what if...?

A lot of mysteries surround our imprisonment.

What if... what if Monobear's special rewards can answer some of them? What if by clearing this dangerous game, I get awarded some answers?

Is it worth it to risk my life in a gamble like this?

...Well, at least my life will have some value if I actually do win this... Gods, when did I get so reckless.

"Oho! I see... looks like someone is going to taste lead today! Puhuhu... I can't wait...!"

I ignore Monobear's taunt and I close the revolver's barrel and give it a spin. Slowly and shakily, I lift the metal contraption to my head, the steel's coldness standing out as my grip tightens around it. I instinctively close my eyes and I gulp audibly as my finger pulls on the trigger.

In my mind, I know its ridiculous. I have a 1/6 chance of winning this. And yet... now that I'm in this situation of unbelievable despair... I find that a small spot of hope has flourished in my chest. Hope for answers... and hope for a life.

Hope for a life with Toothless... and a certain white-haired idiot.

Using these thoughts to fuel my courage, I firmly pull the trigger on the revolver and the last I hear is a loud sound going off in the eerily quiet room where Life and Death are gathered today to witness the outcome of this deranged game, an outcome only they know in advance.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Transitionssssss and cliffhangersssss<strong>

\*\*I hope you enjoyed it, though! As always, reviews and criticisms are welcomed! I am so overjoyed to see so many reviews on this weird fic AU of mine and I'm so glad to see my follower list following. You have no idea. I'm so glad to have you guys as my audience.\*\*

\*\*See ya next time!\*\*

## 24. 2 - Chapter 2 - (ab)Normal Days B

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - (ab)Normal Days B\*\*

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><p><strong>Alright then! Let's get down to business. Scientifically. I'm on a roll with these chapters lately! Do enjoy!<strong>

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><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

"So... why are you still here?"

I couldn't lie to myself; I was sick with worry ever since Hic left for the Final Dead Room. I was so worried that I was completely on edge and I found myself getting angry easily.

Which is why I asked Pitch what the hell he was doing here. Was he

trying to get on my nerves and call me names? I was not in the mood for his jeering; I had a crime scene to investigate.

The Ultimate Fear Expert was looking at me intently, and he stepped closer to Nick's body as if he were going to inspect it. "Oh, I really don't have a reason to stay here... I only want to make sure you properly investigate. You did promise Haddock that you would do so, but I am not confident in your ability to do so satisfactorily..."

"Great, so I am going to have you as an assistant? This is the best day of my life!", I exclaimed with as much fake enthusiasm I could muster. I didn't have time for this...! I had a crime scene to check! I deliberately ignored Pitch as I walked towards Nick's body and I knelt down in order to get a closer look to the... uh... rather gruesome looking wounds.

A sigh from Pitch catches my attention, however. When I turn around, the raven-haired teen has a confused expression on his face, lips pursed. "To be honest, I do have another reason to stay here...", I can see his yellow eyes looking at me intently and I have to look away due to the intensity of his gaze.

"I am interested in you, Jackson Overland."

"Wait wha-?"

...I... did he seriously say that with a straight face?!

"Well, to be more precise, I am interested on both you and Haddock."

...That isn't much better!

"Whoa, Pitch, man... that sounds incredibly creepy...", I say with an awkward laugh. Yeah, it is weirding me out a bit.

"I... apologize. I am not very good at expressing myself, I'm afraid.", He explains, chuckling slightly.

Yeah, no kidding!

"What I really meant is... I'm interested in Hiccup's and your potential."

"...What do you mean 'potential'?", I say as I fully face him. That doesn't make much sense.

A condescending, smug smirk, played on Pitch's lips as he looked down on me. "Don't tell me you forgot all about Haddock's Ultimate talent? Are you really that scatterbrained?"

OK... I had let him talk shit about me for a long while but I'm honestly getting tired of his attitude.

But starting a scene right now would be less than ideal. Clenching my fists in order to suppress the urge of clocking this guy, I simply fall back to answering him. "No... I mean, I know Hic is the Ultimate Lucky Student... but what does that have to do with potential? Or me?"

Pitch's smirk disappears, instead being replaced by a contemplative look. "Hmm, yes... it is only natural you don't understand.", the Ultimate Fear Expert looks to one side, as if he were looking far away from this place. "Tell me, phony... what do you think about Haddock's talent?", as he says this, he turns to face me with a strong gaze. "Do you really think Luck can be considered a talent?"

I was taken aback by the strength of his question. I actually had to think hard about this... I mean, I know Hic doesn't really feel confident on his talent...

"I... I'm not sure, to be honest.", I answer, trying to explain how I feel as best as I can. "I mean, Hic DID say he was only picked through a raffle... and well, could you really call that talent? To begin with, luck is such an... abstract concept! Like... did Hope's Peak Academy really believe that such an abstract thing could be studied and nurtured...? I... just don't know..."

As I finished my poorly put explanation, Pitch closed his eyes, deep in thought, before opening them with a hint of respect for me that honestly surprised me. "I see... it appears you aren't a complete halfwit after all..."

"You and I, phony, think the same about Haddock's potential", continued Pitch, "...Or at least, I used to think that way, until recently."

...Huh?

Pitch took my surprised expression as an instruction to continue.

"Allow me to explain what I learned, Jackson. About what I learned on this camp's library. About the history of the Ultimate Lucky Students and their relationship with Hope's Peak Academy..."

The Ultimate Fear's Expert started his expository tangent...

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\_In the beginning, Hope's Peak Academy's Executive Committee held the same view as you and I. The Headmaster at the time, Jin Kirigiri, was determined on studying all aspects of human talent and potential, and luck was certainly one of them. Since the beginning of time, luck was always a thing that baffled humans. That things would sometimes fall in favor for certain people so consistently... Jin Kirigiri was convinced that if humanity could learn to understand this phenomenon... it would lead to a bright future.\_

\_The Committee did not held such view.\_

\_However, Jin Kirigiri managed to establish a deal. \_

\_If he could prove to the Committee that luck was an observable quality, he would be able to admit students under the Ultimate Lucky Student title to the Academy.\_

\_What he got... was certainly more than what he bargained for.\_

\_The results of the first Ultimate Lucky Student raffle were... fruitful to say the least. For the very student that got selected... was the embodiment of the concept of luck itself. That student from the 77th Hope's Peak Academy Class... was named Nagito Komaeda.\_

That name... for some reason sent shivers down my spine. I was, however, intrigued by this... This was the origin story of Hic's Ultimate title. I let Pitch continue.

\_He apparently was a very unique individual. According to the records I found at the library about this student... he really lived up to his designated Ultimate Lucky Student title. Ever since he was born, his life was dictated by two fluctuating moods; incredible good luck and terrible bad luck. \_

\_As an example... once, Nagito Komaeda was kidnapped as a child by a notorious serial killer. The culprit deposited his hostage on a trash bag. Quite a terrible bit of luck, wouldn't you say?\_

I silently nodded. Pitch saw this as a prompt to continue.

\_But... inside that trash bag, Nagito found a lottery ticket. After he was rescued by the police, the then young Nagito absentmindedly checked the ticket and much to his surprise... he won the big prize.\_

\_Things like that... Nonsensical events that seem to only happen in fiction... were the reality of that student. Extremely good or bad luck... followed by an extreme opposite. That... was Nagito Komadea's whole existence and it extended to anyone who came in contact with him.\_

As I heard Pitch's speech, I couldn't help but to listen silently. What he was telling me... seriously sounded so unbelievable...

And yet... Could something like that... have really happened?

I mean... if Hiccup got selected under the Ultimate Lucky Student title... then is what Pitch saying true?

The Ultimate Fear Expert continued his exposition as I wondered about this.

\_After seeing those results... of course Hope's Peak Academy was intrigued. And so the Ultimate Lucky Student raffle became a staple. And it provided results every year it was held, as luck would have it. Let it be a student who was always getting his way... or a student that, despite having bad luck, always had a silver lining in the end... Hope's Peak Academy came to recognize the potential in this kind of student. And so have I...\_

And with that, Pitch finished talking.

"I see... I understand now...", I said as he looked at me expectantly.

"I see now why you would be interested in Hic's talent... after all,



after hearing you say all that, it definitely sounds like... its an amazing, wild card of a talent."

To be honest, I always thought Hic was an amazing person. Sure, he was shy to a fault, and he sometimes let people push him around and he had to do something about his sarcastic bite, but as a person? I always thought he was talented, Ultimate talent being legitimate or not.

But after hearing Pitch say this? I'm... a little daunted...

"Indeed it is.", commented Pitch, "Ultimate Lucky Students really are wild cards; They can be anything. Or go anywhere. Indeed, I even have heard that some of them even discovered that they had hidden Ultimate talents due to a mere stroke of luck. They really... do have limitless potential". And as he said that, I could hear a hint of admiration in his voice.

I see... yeah, I get it now. That is why Pitch had such an interest in Hic...

But that doesn't explain... something...

"I get why you would be interested in Hic...", I said, catching the Ultimate Fear Expert's attention, "But... why would you be interested in me? I mean, you did say 'your potential'... so why the interest in me? I mean... I thought you hated me?"

As soon as I said that, a malicious smile decorated Pitch's face.

"Were you not hearing? Or are your ears for decoration? I just said that Ultimate Lucky Students affect people around them. And the Haddock boy has an obvious interest in you. I'm merely curious what effect his talent is going to have on you, a talentless idiot, is all."

Something inside me snapped.

"Why?! Why do you hate me so much?! Why do you hate Reserve Course Students so much?! I didn't... I didn't do anything to you, you dick!", I shouted, far angrier than I had ever been before. I was tired of the verbal abuse. I... I was tired of being hated for being something I couldn't control.

The Ultimate Fear Expert was undaunted by my assault. His expression hardened more instead as he towered over me with a glare. "Why shouldn't I? You are a fake"

"You, who paid your way here. You, who has never experienced the suffering of us who have talent. You, who didn't have to work hard to get recognized to get here. You, who only got your parents to sign a check to get here. Do you expect to be treated the same way as us, talented people?", I actually shrunk back a bit as his tone grew cold. "Did you really expect you would fit in with a group like us, who have suffered and worked to get where we are? Don't make me laugh. You were never going to fit in. And you never will."

I... I didn't have anything to say. Against this malice, I had no rebuttals. He... he really harbored a grudge against Reserve Course

Students. He didn't personally hate me, is what I got from his outburst... but he still hated me on principle.

A feeling of impotence flooded me. Being hated by something you couldn't change... did that to you. It was maddening.

I glared at him, not sure if I was angry or sad anymore. "So if you hate me that much... why are you still here?! You don't have to interact with me if you only want to see how Hic is supposedly going to affect me... so why you don't fuck off and leave me alone?!"

Pitch's gaze softened a little, and I could swear I saw doubt in his face, which completely caught me off guard.

"I... I just want to know... why would someone as pitiful and talentless as you... why would Haddock stay around you?"

That... threw me even more off guard. Pitch continued talking unaware of my mood. "You're... even before we learned you were a Reserve Course Student... Haddock hung out with you despite your lack of knowledge about your talent... he stayed by your side even when you didn't have a talent to your name.", He turned to gaze at me again suddenly. "Why? What makes you so special? I guess... you could say that's my motive for staying around you right now... I want to see what someone as special as Haddock sees on you, so to speak..."

Well, if that wasn't creepily put... but I guess it makes sense...

And to be honest? I wanna know too. I... never understood why Hic gave me so much breathing space and attention. Even the others got sick of my antics eventually and though the little Viking always complained about my annoying tricks, he never abandoned me.

Hic really... is something special.

I... I wonder if he's alright...

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><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

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The loud sound resonating through the almost-empty room was agonizing. Any second now, I was expecting the pain. Or rather, not pain, but at least a feeling of loss... a feeling of emptiness. I was waiting for the moment that the bullet fired from that revolver struck my skull.

No matter how much I waited, though, that moment never came...

B...but that was odd! I mean, I heard a loud noise...! So... so a bullet should've been fired and I should be dead, no?! Then... what is happening?

Unsure, I slowly lowered the revolver, treating it like a fragile

crystal figurine. I looked at it with nervousness and sure enough... the gun hadn't fired. At all.

It took my mind a few moments to full process what was going.

I... I played the Final Dead's Room Challenge. I played Russian Roulette.

I... I somehow managed to win with a 1/6 chance of winning.

I... I'm alive!

A-alive!

I put the gun back on its pedestal before falling to my knees in awe and sheer disbelief. I... me... a failure, had defeated the odds. Not just some simple odds! Astronomical odds completely against me! I had managed to overcome this ordeal...!

I was alive...!

A hollow, and yet relief laugh left my lips as I craned my head back, staring at the dilapidated ceiling of the Final Dead Room, as if I were looking at it to fully make sure that I was still on this Earth, alive.

Monobear's voice confirmed that fact.

"Aww... I was sure you were going to blow your lid off... literally!"

The Headmaster's mocking tone sobered me up. I looked at him warily; I had won his conditions for the game, but would Monobear keep his promise? I waited as the Headmaster prattled on.

"Well, Hiccy... I'll be! I guess you ARE the Ultimate Lucky Student! Well... a promise is a promise!", the bear looked at me with a questioning glance. "What? I am a bear of my word! I follow the rules so much even the park rangers don't mess with me!"

"So... you mean you're going to-", I start, before the Headmaster interrupts me by getting far too close to me than I am comfortable with. "Yeah yeah! You are allowed to investigate what lies beyond the Final Dead Room; The Octagon! There, Hiccy, you will be able to claim the Ultimate Weapon!"

I get up from the floor, forcing Monobear off me, and as I look over to the previously barred doors, I see that he's telling the truth; The bars are gone.

The Headmaster tugs at the hem of my shirt to catch my attention. Grudgingly, I give the bear a look that hopefully tells him I am not interested in any sort of "Ultimate Weapon". That look I'm giving him is interrupted by something being thrust right into my face. It takes me a few seconds to recollect myself and really look at the thing the Headmaster is giving me.

A manila envelope. A... rather thick one at that.

Monobear sees my confusion, and with a giggle, starts talking.

"Aaand... much to my surprise, you managed to beat my challenge at the highest difficulty! Wowzers! To think that someone else would do the same..."

Huh? Someone else? So I was right to think that the Blackened had entered this room... but they got the same reward I got? Curious...

"And thus, the drop dead sexy Monobear gives this to you! You Have Obtained \*\*Final Dead Room Reward!\*\* You store it in your \*\*Key Items Pocket!\*\* ...Or something like that! Puhuhuhu!"

Practically forcing the envelope in my hands, the Headmaster disappears after finishing off another nonsensical ramble. I seriously... have no idea what he's talking about sometimes!

And I frankly have no time for that...

I look at the envelope in my hands. All of a sudden, it feels extremely heavy in my hands, and a sense of foreboding starts to fill me.

W-what the heck...? I almost died trying to get this file and now I'm scared to open it...? I have no reason to be so nervous about this file... and yet... Something coming from Monobear is never good news...

But... I mean... I can always look at it later, right? Y-yeah! I have an investigation to perform, after all! O-of course, that is a perfectly valid excuse to not look at this thing right now...!

Having convinced myself of this fact, I put the envelope under my arm and I proceed to the unlocked door, leaving behind the Final Dead Room gladly, onto the so called Octagon.

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><p>What awaited for me in the so called Octagon was entirely beyond my expectations.<p>

I expected the Octagon to be an armory of sorts, full of tools and weapons designed and selected by the Headmaster to be used for murder.

What I got was more or less that, but with a twist.

The room I walked in was aptly octagonal in shape, and it contained several sets of tables filled with a wide variety of weapons of all sorts. The walls were lined with armament and tools like rope and such as well. Along the northern walls, however, laid some refrigerators. Even more perplexing was the small garden beds in arranged in two rows in the middle of the room.

I... seriously didn't know what to make of the fact that an armory had a gardening section of sorts, but weirder things had happened in this Camp.

I-in any case, the killer in North's case definitely came through here, so there has to be some clues here!

Psyching myself as much as I could, I walked towards the nearest table containing the weapons and tools.

I... I recognized a lot of the weapons on the table, as all of them were mostly short blades, which I favored. Knives, switchblades, short swords, daggers and even some rapiers were in display. However...

All of these looked unperturbed. In fact, a layer of dust permeated them. I found it hard to believe that the killer would use these. All of the blades in the table seemed to be coated dust except for a missing spot on the very edge of the table, near some combat knives.

...I mean, I'm guessing the killer DID take a weapon from here, but did the Blackened use one of the combat knives to kill North, or...?

Deep in my thoughts, I examined the other tables full of weapons but none seemed to be tampered with. Which is kind of odd. A lot of these things could be used to kill anyone and in fact I half-expected the Blackened to have used them; killing North was surely not an easy task. He was rather big and strong.

So... how did the Blackened kill North with a combat knife only...? Was it even possible...?

...

Next, I decided to check the refrigerators, as there weren't any weapons missing from the ones displayed on the walls. In fact, most of these weapons seemed to be for display only. I'm guessing this more of Monobear's weird sense of humor.

Cautiously, I opened one of the fridges and let the cool breeze from the object waft over me as I peered inside.

"Huh...?!"

I couldn't help but to exclaim as I saw the interior of the fridge. Countless bottles of all sizes and colors were lined up row after row. Despite the differences between them, there was a common ground for them all.

I picked one up and began to read the label on it.

"Monobear's Special Solanaceae Poison Compound!"

I gulped audibly. My suspicions were correct. Of course, Monobear didn't limit himself when he decided to provide us with weapons. He went full scale on this Octagon. And it made sense, too. Poisoning someone would be quite easily and non-messy.

And yet, the killer in our case... didn't opt to use these, right? I mean, looking at the state of North's body, one can assume as much.

...I-it was r-really bloody after all...!

Fighting back the urge to throw up, I carefully put back the poison back in its place and closed the door with caution. That whole fridge was a lethal container and I certainly didn't want to die here just because of my stupid clumsiness.

I proceeded to check the other fridges but they contained even more poisons. Curiously, though, one of them was left ajar but inside the only interesting thing was the fact that one of the flasks was out of place in its alignment. Picking up the small green bottle, I read the label only to find a large string of letters.

"Dimethylheptylpyran"

...How do you even pronounce that?!

Obviously, I don't even know what this is and yet... why was this sole flask perturbed? I mean, it was obvious the killer in our case hadn't used poison to off North and yet...

Grumbling, I put back the Dimeth- the flask! Back in place. None of this made sense... but there were some more things left for me to check.

\* \* \*

><p>Next, I approached the garden beds. Fully filled with lush, green plants, flowers and even vegetables, I was surprised to see such a beautiful thing in a place designated to killing. Short of poisonous plants, I saw no motive for these. Did the Headmaster enjoy gardening as a side hobby from his main one of torturing kids?<p>

Regardless of the motive behind these, I had to admit I was surprised. Not only were there garden beds here, there was even some glass tubes full of water with aquatic plant samples here. It really was breathtaking. I didn't know much about plants but even I could tell most of these were normal household plants.

For a moment, I was distracted by a set of blooming white roses, and I found myself making allusions to a certain white haired idiot, fully oblivious to the fact that I was wasting precious investigation time.

And then I was brought back to reality when I found something I knew far too well and that I didn't expect to find here.

Blue Oleander.

Unpleasant memories started to resurface.

Blue Oleander is a small flower. In fact, one could say it was quite beautiful, what with its five delicate petals colored in a striking blue hue. However, that cute facade belies a terrible secret that I remember far too well. Blue Oleander is highly poisonous to all reptiles, including dragons. We had an incident back in Berk when one of the traders unwittingly brought a cargo of it into the village and it almost killed all our dragons.

To think that such a flower would be here...

Instinctively, I looked around the same garden bed that contained the Blue Oleander and to my dismay I found more plants endemic to Berk only. The names and effects of them were written on signs nearby in a childish scribble.

Dragon Root, which made dragons extremely aggressive or agitated.

Dragon Nip, which had the opposite effect.

Dragonsbane was also present, a plant that put dragons in a submissive state.

Heck, I even found a Glowing Algae sample in a nearby test tube. That kind of plant only appears every 10 years in Berk!

"What in Thor's name is going on here...?" I muttered. This made zero sense... these kinds of plants couldn't be found anywhere in the world and they need to be grown under very specific conditions for them to bloom correctly! And yet here we have a garden bed full of healthy specimens, in this camp of all places!

First the dragons... and now Berk-endemic plants...

Just... how...? Who... is the Mastermind behind our capture...?

And... did the Blackened use the plants in the murder...? Why would there even be plants in a room for weapons, anyway?!

Dammit... I don't understand what is going on...

\* \* \*

><p>Finally, on a table covered in papers and pencils that were thrown all over the place in disarray, I found a strange object. Carefully picking it up from the mess, I found myself holding a strange remote control. It was crudely made, the hinges being held by duct tape, and it seriously looked like something out of a cartoon, what with the big red button with a Monobear head on it.<p>

What in Thor's name is this thing? It's giving off an ominous vibe...

As if he had read my mind, Monobear appeared behind me, definitely making me scream shrilly.

"Well, I'll be, Hiccy! Looks like you found this room's most precious treasure... the Ultimate Weapon!"

I composed myself and looked down to the remote in my hands. This... was the Ultimate Weapon the Blackened risked his life for...? I was... underwhelmed, to say the least...

"Hrrrgh! I see that look in your face...", said Monobear as he growled at me with extended claws. "You're probably thinking 'Wow! This thing is so poorly constructed. I bet a sexy idiot made this!'" The bear's expression changed to one of sadness as he continued his ramble, "Uuu... It's the best I could do! I don't have opposable thumbs, after all... Boo hoo... boo hoo hoo hoo."

I ignored Monobear's exaggerated crying as he disappeared and instead focused on the remote on my hands again. How... could this cruddy looking thing be the Ultimate Weapon? All my misgivings notwithstanding, if Monobear was telling the truth... then this thing is going to be useful for the Class Trial.

Taking care of not pressing the button (I didn't want to end up killing anybody else by accident) I took the thing with me and continued investigating the Octagon.

I finished my search of the Octagon with even more questions than answers. I found plenty of what-ifs and possibilities that could be used in the Trial as clues, but no concrete link to the Blackened.

It was a bit... disheartening, and I was seriously anxious now...

I couldn't give up, though. Toothless and everyone else were depending on me.

\* \* \*

><p>As I took a final lap around the weapon-filled room, I found something I had missed under one of the tables.<p>

A trap door.

How... cliché can one get? Seriously, Monobear has no taste at all...

Still, I was curious about this. It wouldn't be strange for a secret tunnel or something to be here, taking Monobear's personality and love for theatrics in consideration. Where would such a tunnel lead to, though? Why did Monobear even install a trapdoor here? How could this help us kill each other?

...I-I guess there really is only one way to find out. Thank Odin there are no Whispering Deaths here... I seriously hate those dragons...

...But first...

I stood up and walked down to a nearby table, where the manila envelope Monobear had handed me laid, along with the so-called Ultimate Weapon. Hesitatingly, I picked up the prize and with slow movements, I started unwinding the string that held the envelope closed, conscious of my accelerating heartbeat.

This... this could be the clues we needed to make sense of our situation... so naturally, I was nervous and excited! This... this could be it!

As soon as the string was undone, I opened the envelope clumsily and dumped the contents in the table to better get a look at them...!

And I froze.

The contents of the envelope was a newspaper issue.



But that wasn't what made me freeze. It was the photo in the front page. On it, I could see a collage made from a plethora of people's pictures, but despite that, I managed to zero-in on a couple of faces I recognized too well.

Stoick, my dad... Goober... and Jack.

"What the Hel...", I mumbled. What were they doing on...on an newspaper article with a lot of other people?

Curious, I began to read the headline and-

I held my breath. I was astonished. Baffled. Was... was I... reading that right...? No, there was no way that was... correct... Because that headline... that headline reads...!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>"The Tragedy" Claims Even More Victims. Missing People's Whereabouts Still Unknown.<strong>

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><p>I was, of course, intrigued. And mortified. This... this was surely a lie from Monobear, no? What is... tragedy stuff? Victims?!<p>

Curious, I jumped right to the page that had the article on the front page and began reading in search of answers:

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><p><em>Authorities are still on the lookout of the missing students and civilians on the outbreak of The Tragedy. Though the army is on full-alert and fully deployed in order to suppress the riots and to find any of the reported missing people, it is highly suspected that these missing people have joined the ever-growing list of victims.<em>

\_Today's victims, as reported by Hope's Peak Academy, are as follows:\_

\_Spitelout Jorgenson\_

\_Finn Hofferson\_

\_Tadashi Hamada\_

\_Manuel I. Moony\_

\_Fergus DunBronch\_

\_Stoick Haddock\_

\_Jack Overland\_

\_Gobber the Belch (sic)\_

\_Jamie Benett\_

\_Emma Overland\_

\_Among the many missing people, the following were reported:\_

\_Valka Haddock\_

\_Hiro Hamada\_

\_Elinor DunBronch\_

\_Jackson Overland\_

\_It is advised to the general population to not wander the streets alone. Gas masks should always be worn on excursions though going outside the shelters is not advised as your safety is not guaranteed. As there is no known weapon better suited to combat the Monobear riot-robots, authorities suggest that no civilians should confront the robots. These machines are programmed to kill on sight.\_

\_Hope's Peak Academy and the Future Foundation haven't given any estimates on how long these riots will continue, but have promised that they will deal with the Monobears soon enough.\_

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><p>...<p>

...

Huh?

W...wh...at.. in the w...orld?

I re-read the article multiple times. Scanned every sentence, every letter, trying to make sense of this... this \_thing\_. \_To try to find the joke, the punchline, the lie. Because this article... this farce... this had to be a lie. \_Had to be.\_

Riots? Missing People? The Tragedy? Monobear robots?  
\_Victims?\_

This... this thing was absolute madness on paper. There was no way that this article was true. Because... because...

There was no way my dad and Gobber were... were \_dead\_.  
\_R...right...?

There was no way I... I was all alone now in the world now, right? They... they couldn't be dead...!

There was... no way... I didn't have a home now... no, that...!  
That's just... impossible!

Without realizing, I had crunched up the article in my fist. When did I close my eyes? It didn't matter... I didn't want to see anything. I didn't... want to acknowledge the truth in front of me.

Because... it is the truth. This, coupled with Monobear's video

motive... this article just... proves it.

I no longer will be able to have a back-and-forth with Gobber. I will never learn more tricks about the forge and I will no longer be called names and no longer will get my hair ruffled when I do a good job and... and... I will never be able to ever hear my father say to me in person, that he... that he is proud of me... and...!

I bit my lip as hard as I could and shut my eyes close even further. It was all I could do to drown the sobs that were threatening to escape as I silently cried and let the tears fall on the newspaper article in front of me.

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><p>I don't know how many minutes passed as I tried to come to terms with what I just learned.<p>

I just felt empty. Devoid of any emotion. I felt... hopeless... full of despair.

And I was also confused.

I... wasn't going to deny the truth anymore. My dad... was most likely dead.

However, what I was confused about was the fact that...

Apparently, the Jack I know... was dead.

No matter how I look at that, though... it is clearly impossible. Because Jack... is right here! I've interacted with that idiot ever since I awoke in this camp/

It clearly is impossible... he can't be dead and be in front of me at the same time! What does this even mean?!... This article is true but it contradicts the facts! Is the article mistaken? Or am I in the wrong? If the article is correct and I'm mistaken then... what does that make the Jack currently here? Is he... the\_ real Jack\_ or...?

This... this... article didn't bring more answers... it just brought more questions. And despair.

...Should I discuss this with the others? It's definitely important... but we need to focus on the investigation right now. I'll definitely bring this up later... to Jack and the others... but for now I have to survive.

With a sigh, I put the accursed newspaper back into the envelope and I grab the trapdoor's handle firmly before opening it. A maw of darkness extends beyond the trapdoor, so dark I can't even see the bottom, though some rungs around the the tunnel's walls can be seen.

I carefully make my way down the secret exit, envelope on my mouth and Ultimate Weapon tucked in between my jean's waistline.

...I wonder... where this tunnel goes to...?

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

The ElectroID's familiar start-up noise sounded clearly as I began to look at the Monobear File #2. With a gulp, I scrolled through the file using the touch screen interface, reading up all the details on Nick's autopsy report.

**\*\*The victim was Nicholas St. North, the Ultimate Sculptor.\*\***

**\*\*There are several wounds all over the victims body. A slim cut on the victim's wrist can be observed. In addition, several gashes, matching with animal bites and scratches can be seen on the arms of the person. Three stab wounds, measuring 6 cms in depth, can be observed on the victim's chest. Finally, the deceased's torso presents signs of fractures due to tremendous force applied to it. Internal hemorrhaging and a foreign substance have also been detected.\*\***

I had to take a few minutes to compose myself. Just reading... the gruesome details made my stomach churn. But I had to do this... Hic was counting on me.

The file was incredibly detailed this time, though... and yet, something seems amiss.

"So, you noticed it too?"

Pitch's sudden query made me turn to him. He was looking at the Monobear File with an intense gaze. So... he noticed it too.

I nodded. "Yeah... the file is... detailed to a fault, but even with all the grisly details, it's missing something very important: the true cause of death."

Pitch hummed, a faint smile on his lips. "So you DID notice...". I scoffed at that, but he continued before I could speak. "Yes, that is true... Unlike the previous Monobear File, this one is missing that detail... which probably means the cause of death is important to this case."

"What do you mean?", I asked, a bit lost. The Ultimate Fear Expert's smile falters before it returns with a sense of smugness behind it. "What I mean is... Monobear purposely left this information out of the file, therefore, it is not a stretch to think that the cause of death points to the culprit... Which is why Monobear didn't outright state it."

I see... It makes sense that way... and its definitely something the Headmaster would pull.

"So, if we can figure what the case of death is, we will have the culprit's identity revealed?', I ask hopefully.

"Hmm, yes... I believe so... but actually figuring that out is going to be a challenge... After all", says Pitch as he looks at the corpse. "There ARE a lot of wounds... discerning which one actually did him in will be difficult." The Ultimate Fear Expert then looks to

see Toothless, who is sniffing around for clues. "It really looks like the dragon did it, don't you think?"

I instantly glared back at him. "Don't even start, Pitch. There is no way that is true."

The raven-haired teen simply laughed at my comment. "Huh... so you really believe in that creature that much?"

I crossed my arms, painfully aware of the heat in my cheeks. "I-if Hic believes in Toothless, so I do." I could feel the Night Fury's tongue on my hair as soon as I finished saying that, but I didn't even complain; I was already deep in dragon spit. Pitch merely laughed.

"I see... Just for the record, I did say "it really looks like the dragon did it"... which is to say, I don't believe our dear Toothless is the culprit. It just... looks too obvious, don't you think? Almost as if... he was being framed."

I nodded, sending globs of dragon spit flying, which Pitch comically avoided. Yeah, it looked like that to me too. Someone was trying to pin this on Toothless... and finding out who is the whole reason behind this investigation.

Hardening my resolve, I approached the corpse. Up this close... It was weird. This object... was once a living person, full of emotion, energy, dreams, hopes, thoughts... I couldn't quite see this... thing as my friend. It was so alien to me.

But there wasn't any time for sentimentality here.

That's when I noticed that, among the sea of blood that surrounded Nick were transparent, glass-like shards of different sizes. Picking one up, I quickly realized these weren't glass shards, but plastic shards.

A flash of insight.

"Say... wasn't there some plastic walls in the middle of the Great Hall back when Monobear was giving us those crappy lessons?", I asked out loud. Pitch brought his finger to his chin, deep-in thought, before nodding.

"Yes, I do believe so. And I think I see what you're getting at. Those shards... around North's body are most likely the walls Monobear was using for protection."

"I see... but, don't you think that's weird?", my question took Pitch by surprise, judging by his reaction. "I mean, those walls were strong enough to deter a Night Fury from attacking... So, how did they even break in the first place?"

"Hmm, that is indeed odd...", mumbled Pitch, for the first time in my life seeing his brow furrow. "Something tells me that this will be critical in the Class Trial. Unfortunately... I don't know how this came to pass. Nevertheless, we must not forget that."

I nodded back. This was an important detail. Surely this had to do with Nick's cause of death but I still don't have enough info to go

on. I should check out other places to investigate; the others might have found some other clues.

"C'mon Toothless", I beckoned to the Night Fury which followed me with unsure eyes, "We're going to check out more places." A pair of unsure acid green eyes looked at me and I gave him the best smile I could manage. "Don't worry, you big gecko. We'll definitely prove your innocence."

The following lick attack was not unexpected but also not unwelcome. I laughed in a carefree manner, trying to ease both the Night Fury's and my worries like that.

Yeah... we'll definitely... definitely find proof.

I lamely said good bye to Pitch, who halfheartedly returned the gesture with a wave of his hand. Yep... looks like he still hates me.

And yet, as I made my way out of the Great Hall, I felt a lingering gaze on the back of my head...

\* \* \*

><p>On the steps that led to the Grand Square, I found Rapunzel and Merida talking agitatedly. Upon seeing me, however, they gave me a feeble greeting which I tried to return in earnest.<p>

"'Sup, Punzie. Mer."

"I've been tellin' you to drop that rubbish of a nickname, Jack, so help me", complained Merida and I chuckled at her reaction. Of course, I paid in full with a sore arm but I live for my jokes. Punzie laughing at the scene in front of her made this worth it too.

"So, any clues?", I ask, once the oddly cheerful scene plays out. Predictably, the two girls' mood dampens and I'm sad to see a pair of shaking heads. Crap, no new info here, huh?

"I just feel so bad about Hiccup and Toothless, though...", says Punzie as she pets the Night Fury with sad eyes. "How could anyone think that this adorable thing would harm anyone?"

I resist the urge to comment on the fact that this "adorable thing" almost fried her to death.

"Yeah, seriously. That Haddock has saved our butts before, I don't get why the other blokes don't trust his word.", says Merida, looking very annoyed.

"Yeah! And I mean, how can they think Toothless did it!", exclaims the blonde, looking excited. "Toothless didn't have any blood on him, so it couldn't be him right?!"

"Yeah, besides...", continues Mer, "He and Hiccup were together always before the incident, right?! So the dragon has an alibi!"

...Actually, now that I think about it... Hiccup was unconscious

before the incident and while it was true that Toothless was with me and Hic... When I fell asleep... there was a period of time where the Night Fury was unaccounted for...

Man, this isn't looking good...

I don't say anything about this. I don't want them to trust Toothless. Instead, I give a half-baked answer and part ways with the girls, encouraging them to search for more clues.

...No! What am I thinking? Of course Toothless is innocent! So what if he was unaccounted for? That...doesn't mean he did... it.

Unwillingly, a seed of doubt starts to grow in my heart as I go the hotel in search for more clues, the Night Fury who I am starting to doubt faithfully following me around.

\* \* \*

><p>Just outside of the shady hotel, I find Snotlout and the Twins discussing something loudly. I exchange a look with Toothless before I approach the trio.<p>

"Sup guys? What are you doing...?" I greet them, and they all turn to look at me with a scowl in their faces.

"Oh, its you, Jack.", says Snot with a grunt. "Nothing. I'm trying to figure out who the killer is."

"Yeah, but it will be a miracle if, you know, he actually finds out.", says Tuff with a snicker.

"Yeah, after all, he's like, not very smart at all." supplements Ruff, laughing along with her brother.

"Shut up, you losers!", shouts Snotlout, looking extremely bothered, "I'm sure the clue we found is going to point to the killer!"

"Huh? Did you find something, Snot?" I query, and the Ultimate Heavy Lifter looks at me with pride on his eyes. "Yeah, I did! Take a look at the piece of evidence that will solve this case; the piece of evidence found by Snotlout, yeah!"

No sooner the words were out of his mouth, did the burly teen whip out a combat knife. I instantly took a step back by instinct. The blade was obviously linked to the murder, as it was stained with blood!

"W-where did you find this?", I asked as I took the weapon from Snot's hands and turned it over to examine it, feeling a bit queasy at the crimson liquid sticking to the blade thickly.

Snot shrugged his shoulders and pointed towards the backside of the motel. Exchanging looks with Toothless once more, I began walking where the Ultimate Heavy Lifter had pointed me to.

And I was greeted by blood. A stark contrast of crimson and white was displayed in front of me, the once pristine snow stained thoroughly in a wide area.

Yeah... this place was... definitely linked to the murder.

"It was like this when we found it.", said Ruff, scaring the hell out of me.

"Yup, no footprints, only blood and snow.", followed Tuff, looking at the scene with a grimace.

"And this knife buried in it!", exclaimed Snot, looking even more proud.

"I see... but...", I said as I faced the others. "Don't you find... this odd?"

"Not particularly." "Nope.", came the answer of the twins, while Snot simply shook his head.

I let out a deep sigh. "Don't you see it guys? I mean, this place has a lot of blood and a knife was found here... and yet... why is Nick's body not here? How did it end on the Great Hall."

Judging by the confused looks on their faces, I guess they just realized that.

"The dragon probably carried North away.", said Tuff, looking very happy with himself. I suppressed a groan. I... didn't have the energy to point out how wrong that logic was, both on principle and on evidence. They had just told me that there were no footprints of any sort, so of course Toothless couldn't have dragged the body. Let alone the fact that there were no drag marks in the snow nor any more bloodstains aside from the one here. And yet... that also raised another question. If there were no signs of the body being moved... how did it end at the Great Hall?

I didn't mention any of this to the bickering trio, though. Instead, I walked near the edge of the bloodstains in the snow and, with my breath held, started to dig through the snow for potential clues. "Whatever happened here," I said to my entourage as the snow started to sting my bare hands, "has clearly to do with the case."

After almost giving up because of the pain from the cold, my hands grabbed something. Quickly pulling out from the stained blood, I examined the thing I had found with my heart ready to burst with the excitement of a breakthrough...!

Only to find myself staring at a small, fragment in my hand. It was white, and extremely small, and yet a little hard. Turning it over, I could see some weird colored blotches on it. But aside from that... this small, hard fragment... probably has nothing to do with the case.

I found nothing on the scene aside from that and by the end of all that digging through the snow, I was surprised I didn't get frostbite from that.

Still, it is puzzling... like, if this isn't the crime scene, why was there so much blood and a knife here? And yet, there weren't any tracks leading away from this particularly suspicious spot..



Just what happened here... and what did it have to do with the crime? I turned towards the Twins and Snot to ask about their opinion on the case.

"I'm telling you, idiots, the culprit has to be someone stained with blood"

"So, Snotlout, are you saying the dragon isn't the culprit?"

"Yeah, I mean, that Toothless didn't have any blood on him."

"His name is Toothless, Tuffnut, you dumbass!"

...

I left the quarreling trio and headed back to the hotel, putting my hands in my hoodie's front pocket in order to warm them up.

\* \* \*

><p>I left the hotel's lobby in a bad mood because I ran into Flynn. The Ultimate Thief was just lounging around on a chair, not doing any investigation because he was so sure of Toothless' guilt. I resisted the urge to deck him; I really did. But I didn't have time to waste.<p>

On the second floor, I found Anna and Elsa walking around as if they were looking for something, with Bunny observing them both. They all froze when they saw Toothless (Anna visibly pretending he wasn't there) and I could tell Toothless didn't take it well. Still, I had to gather as much info as I could, so I went to talk to them and asked if they had found out anything.

Unfortunately, I could tell from their faces that they hadn't. With a sigh, I almost turned to leave, but Elsa's voice stopped.

"Excuse me, Mr. Overland. I have a question."

I turned around and prodded her with a raised eyebrow. Her face was unreadable as she spoke.

"It has come to my attention that it was you, Mr. Haddock and Mr. Bunnymund... you were the ones to discover the body?"

"Uh, yeah... it was me, Hic, Bunny, Mer, Tooth, Punzie, Tuff, Ruff, Fish and Flynn... why do you ask?"

"It just seems weird...", continued Elsa as she fiddled with the tip of her ponytail. "I mean, why did you guys find the body before us? What compelled you to go to the scene of the crime?"

"That would've been the mighty loud noise we heard in the mornin'", interjected Bunny before I could say something, but I nodded and explained to Elsa: "Yeah, we woke up because of this loud crashing noise and then all of us went to the Grand Square because we had apparently missed Monobear's lesson of the day."

"Oh yeah! I did find it odd that Monobear didn't raise a stink because of that.", said Anna, looking bashful. "I can't believe we overslept..."

"Yes, I cannot believe that either.", continued Elsa, with mild confusion written on her face. "Doesn't it strike you as odd, Anna? Why would we sleep through a noise that apparently was so loud the others were jolted awake?"

"Uh... maybe we were too tired from the hunger pangs?", offered Anna with an unsure voice.

But... that couldn't be it. I mean, Hic was out cold and he heard it. What could this mean?

With them having nothing to show and me not having them anything new to say, I proceeded to the next floor.

\* \* \*

><p>On the third floor, I found two more people; Tooth and Fishlegs. The Ultimate Dentist, however, immediately left the floor as soon as she saw the Night Fury following me with an expression that could only be described as disdain.<p>

Ouch. I didn't have to look at Toothless to tell that the growl that left his mouth was one of sadness. I'm guessing Tooth is taking Nick's death personally; the two did seem closer than usual.

Fish was fidgeting restlessly as he saw the scene unfold and he was visibly sweating when Toothless and I approached him. Thankfully, he didn't flee, so I stroked up a conversation with him.

"Oh, hey, Jack! Um... N-nice weather we're having, right?"

"Dude... we just finished having a blizzard."

"Oh, right...", said the Ultimate Encyclopedia with a bashful smile. "I kinda forgot about that... what with how it suddenly ended. Weird, huh? How can the Headmaster even do that?"

True, the storm quieted down as soon as we discovered the murder. How did Monobear even manage to time that? There was something up with that stuffed toy...

"Well, no use worrying about that for now.", I said with a shrug. "We have a culprit to find."

"Y-yeah... though I don't know why we're even doing this... I mean, the culprit is obvious...", said Fish as he glanced nervously at the Night Fury.

"Fish, c'mon! Don't tell me you suspect him too!", I yelled, making the chubby teen flinch.

"G-give me a break! He... he's the only one that could have done it! I-I mean...!", stuttered Fish as he rubbed his hands nervously.

"Those... those wounds... have to be because of Toothless!"

"But...!", I said as I pulled out the Monobear File. "How do you explain the knife wound, huh?!"

"W-well...!", mumbled Fish, closing his eyes, "W-what if... he... had... an accomplice...?"

I nearly lost my grip there. My voice came out low and threatening as I clenched my fists with anger. "Are you implying that... Hic is the accomplice...?!"

"Eep! N-no! I would never...!", shouted Fish frantically as he took a step back from my glare. "I-I'm just throwing the possibility there... it could be it, you know! You never know!"

I left the room hastily, rage filling every step I took as I left the mumbling mess of a boy behind, Toothless hot on my heels. I didn't know where I was going, but anywhere but here was better. I couldn't believe people were going to doubt Hic too! It didn't make sense! Hic had an alibi!

It took me a while to realize I had stomped off to the Grand Square. I looked up at the slowly falling snow. It was serene and... beautiful. Quite unlike the eerie storm we had experienced during that hellish torture. It was odd of me to sound so poetic, but there really was something mesmerizing about snow. Everytime I looked at it... like this... I felt a sense of nostalgia. Of days past by. And yet I also felt happy. Snow... somehow symbolized to me endless possibilities, a blank canvas. Maybe... something about my missing memory had to do with this feeling?

...

In any case, looking at the snow cooled my temper off. A nudge in my hand from Toothless' snout made me remember what I should be doing. All those accusations didn't matter right now. The important thing was proving this lizard friend of mine innocent. And to do that, I had to find conclusive evidence of Toothless' innocence. With that in mind, I decided to revisit the Great Hall. Maybe I had missed something on the crime scene...

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...

"What... are you doing here?"

Upon walking into the Great Hall, I was expecting to find Pitch and the corpse just as I left them. What greeted me, however, was a person I didn't expect to find. Near the farthest wall, as he walked nonchalantly through a door that was \_most certainly not there before,\_ was the unmistakable mop of hair, freckled skin and thin frame of Hic.

I had to rub my eyes a little to make sure I wasn't hallucinating.

"Oh... so it leads to here too..."

I heard Hic mumble that, completely ignoring my question as he looked around the scene with an unreadable face, and it only raised more questions in my mind.

"What... are you doing here, Haddock?", asked Pitch, repeating my question with a baffled expression, and that made Hic look truly at us. I walked up to him and hugged him in relief.

"Oh, Hic... I'm so glad you're OK!". Truly, it didn't matter to me that much how he had arrived here; what mattered was the fact that Hiccup was fine! He had gone to the Final Dead Room and I was so worried about his well-being... but the fact that he was here only meant that he had won.

Hic tensed up when I hugged him and he pulled away from me a little too fast. "Uh... yeah, I-I'm alright... yeah!" he said, not really looking at me, instead looking down to his side. What's up with that reaction? If I didn't know Hic, I'd thought he... wasn't happy to see me.

But that can't be it, right? Hic was certainly not touchy-feely but... he likes me at least enough to let me hug him, right...?

And... what is that file that he's holding? Is that what he's looking at...?

Pitch speaks again before I can ask him what's wrong, though. "I said: "What are you doing here Haddock?". Why are you suddenly here? You were supposed to be at the Final Dead Room..."

Hic looked at Pitch with a blank expression, before answering with a sarcastic tone. "Uh... I'm here because I showed up?"

I had to give props to Pitch; he took that one on stride. His expression didn't change as he kept talking. "I see... if you are here, it means you defeated the Final Dead Room's challenge... Did you find anything out?"

The Ultimate Lucky Student's grip on the envelope he was carrying tightened as he spoke with a slight hint of nervousness on his face. "Y-yeah... you could say that."

Pitch simply closed his eyes. "Very well...", a smile I didn't like spread on his lips. "I'll be looking forward to your performance on the Class Trial, then."

"S-sure... whatever...", said Hic in a dismissing tone.

He... was acting very strange. Had he found something at the Final Dead Room that had made him act that way? Maybe...

"Hey, Hic, what's that file you got there?", I asked, reaching out for it. The little Viking stepped back and out from my grasp as soon as he noticed my action.

"Oh, uh... right, that... Do you mind waiting until after the Class Trial, Jack?", he said, looking a bit conflicted as he looked between the file and me. "This.. is kind of important info and we need to discuss this with everybody else but... w-we need to focus on the investigation! So, please...?"

"Oh... alright...". I said, feeling kinda put off by Hic's nervous

behavior. There was... something definitely wrong with him and I was dying to know what he discovered but... I had to relent. He was right.

The little Viking in front of me sighed as he saw me step back and immediately went to greet Toothless with a hug and a smile, which the Night Fury returned in full with a gummy grin. I... wasn't jealous or anything...

Hic then proceeded to look at the body and started comparing the Monobear File with it with a methodical flair, his green eye's scanning over the corpse with such intensity I could almost hear the gears on his mind working.

He then lifted his shirt (I didn't stare at his belly as he did so and I didn't stare at the few freckles I could see, no!) and pulled out a weird contraption from his jeans. Is that... a remote control? What is it for? ...And why does it look so poorly made?

The little Viking simply kept looking at it, the body (specifically, Nick's chest), and the ceiling until he mumbled an "I see" while he nodded. Did he figure something out? I looked at the ceiling above us and all I could see was a massive chandelier. Unfortunately, unlike Hic, I didn't exactly "see" anything. But before I could ask what he had figured out...

\*\*\*Ding dong ding dong\*\*\*

Nearby static on a monitor could be heard as it came to life, and both the Headmaster's voice and visage could be heard and seen. "Time's up! I've grown quite tired of waiting! I'd say you guys had pleeeenty of time to investigate to your heart's content, but I'm a busy bear on a schedule! Please take the cable car and gather in front of Monobear Tower. Puhuhuhu! I'll see you bastards soon!"

With a flicker, the monitor went off.

This... was it. The Class Trial was about to begin. The anxiety that only happens when you're about to do something big started to swell on my chest.

"Looks like its time for the show to start.", said Pitch with a creepy smile as he walked off towards the exit with fast yet elegant steps.

I turned to Hic and Toothless and put on my best smile, trying to belie the anxiety inside me. "Well... shall we get going?"

"Y-yeah", answered Hic, putting on a strong face totally in conflict with his stutter. Toothless merely tilted his head as he looked at us both before slightly nodding his large head.

With nothing more to be said, we headed towards the cable car.

Towards... the Class Trial.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

All of us had gathered in front of Monobear Tower and we boarded the elevator as we had instructed. The doors closed behind us and soon enough, the ascent began.

The elevator ride was once again a silent endeavor. No one said anything, and yet the atmosphere was charged. With anticipation, with doubt, with... distrust.

We had all been friends until the murder happened. We thought we had made a promise to never let this happen. I... I thought we wouldn't make this mistake again; I thought we wouldn't fall for Monobear's trap.

But we were mistaken. And because of that... because we left our guard down, another killing had happened.

Someone here... murdered our friend in order to escape. I still don't know who did it... but I'm going to find out, no matter what.

Who betrayed our trust? Who tried to frame Toothless for a crime he didn't commit? Who was willing to end the life of North and sacrifice us all to escape?

The answer... all of that is going to be revealed soon.

The elevator stops as in cue, and the door slowly open to the courtroom where we will once again face off against each other, doubting and debating until the end.

The Class Trial billowing with both hope and despair... has begun.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Woo! The next one is going to be big !<strong>

\*\*So what do you think? As always, I hope I didn't give away too much on this chapter; I want the killer to be a surprise. That isn't to say that you can't figure out who the culprit is. You just pay attention to details; there's some clues in the (ab)Normal Days sections, but I at least hope I can surprise you guys if you can't figure it out.\*\*

\*\*I always get nervous when it comes to writing the murder and class trial sequences, as they have to be easy to follow yet complicated. In any case, tell me what you think; your reviews fill my despair-ridden heart with glee!\*\*

\*\*See ya in the Class Trial!\*\*

## 25. 2 - Chapter 2 - Class Trial

\*\*Chapter 2 - Living to the Fullest - Class Trial\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Once more, here we are. The big one II. No seriously, this is a big one! At 18k words, this is the longest chapter I've ever written!<strong>

**\*\*As usual, writing Trial and Murder chapters is a big stress source for me, and also a source of enjoyment. I have to make these easy to follow and clear for everyone. However, since this is a rather long trial, I've decided to add something to it that wasn't on the previous ones. Those familiar to the Danganronpa games will recognize it. As such, I hope from the bottom of my heart that you guys enjoy this long read and! Without further ado, dig in!\*\***

**\*\*The curtain rises on another Class Trial!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

As soon as the doors opened, the courtroom came into view, as expected. What I didn't expect, however, was the fact that Monobear had redecorated the place; the courtroom had been transformed into a more dungeon-like place, the walls made out of concrete and windows with iron bars scattered along them sporadically. Blue velvet curtains hung from the ceiling and a concrete floor with red stains spread below us.

...Ugh, what a terrible taste...

Of course, our group immediately noticed the change and commented on it.

"Hey, what gives with the courtroom?!", asked Snotlout.

"I got bored of the previous arrangement, so I changed it! Doesn't it look nice?", declared Monobear, looking prideful as he stuck out his chest.

"...It looks rather drab.", muttered Elsa

"I like it.", commented Tuffnut, to which Ruff agreed. Aside from that, pretty much all of us agreed with that, much to the Headmaster's annoyance.

"Hmph, whatever. Just take your places and let's get this show on the road, already, you tasteless plebeians who wouldn't recognize art if it peed in your faces!"

"Ew.", was all Anna said as we took our place in our designated booths, which still had the same cruddy drawings. This time, however, we were joined by more sign posts...

In addition to Sandy's and Astrid's sign post was occupying her place, her picture crossed over with two red axes forming a cross... and North's sign post replacing him on his booth as well.

...

I... will find out who the killer is...! I promise this to you, Astrid... Sandy... North.

As soon as Monobear saw us all set in place, he began his speech with gusto:

"Ahora... empecemos con una simple explicacion del Juicio Estudiantil! Durante el Juicio Estudiantil, ustedes debatiran y discutiran para descubrir la verdadera identidad el Enegrecido! Si ustedes logran descubrir quien fue el culpable y votan por esa persona correctamente... solo el Enegrecido sera castigado! Pero si votan por la persona equivocaaaaada... el Enegrecido sera libre de escapar y los demas seran ejecutados!"

...

...

No one spoke at all after the Headmaster finished his speech.

"Uh... what the hell was that?", asked Flynn, looking annoyed

"I have to spice things up if I want to keep this thing interesting, right?", said Monobear as if his explanation was perfectly acceptable.

"There's no need to make a horrible event like this even more interesting!", yelled Tooth, looking actually angry.

"Yeah, and besides, how is a french-talking bear interesting!", said Tuffnut.

"Um, I'm pretty sure that was Spanish, Tuffnut...", said Rapunzel with a nervous smile.

"Ugh, whatever! Let's get started already, OK? Forget the fucking bear!", shouted Snotlout, and I had to say I regretted the fact that I was agreeing with him a lot lately.

"Alright, but where do we even start?", asked Merida, looking a bit lost.

"How about we start with the vote, eh?", suddenly said Flynn. "After all, we already know who the killer is this time." And as he finished saying that, he looked over to Toothless with a suspicious glance.

"Aye, I agree with Flynn, let's do this.", said Aster, much to my disbelief.

"W-well, if all of you agree...", mumbled Fishlegs, much to my dismay.

"Oh?! Ballot Time so soon?!", said Monobear, looking giddy with anticipation.

Oh no...

"W-wait! Hold on! We haven't even debated anything!", I managed to blurt out far louder than I had intended.

"But, Hiccup! It is just as Aster said!", suddenly interjected Tooth, looking at me with a scathing glare. "The only possible killer is Toothless! It's... It's his fault North is dead!"

"That's not true, Tooth!", argued Jack, and I thanked him for backing



me up.

"I do believe it defeats the whole purpose of the Class Trial if we don't even hold a debate.", said Peter in his soothing, silky voice.

"We are, after all, putting our lives on the line here." explained Elsa. "We need to be absolutely sure the dragon's guilt is absolute before we make a decision."

"Yeah!", yelled Snotlout, again to my surprise. "I ain't doing no voting unless we're fucking certain of Toothless' guilt!"

"I'm not votin' either!"

"Me neither!"

I seriously had to resist the urge of hugging both Merida and Rapunzel and everyone who had stood up for Toothless' sake. Flynn's face lost all fire when he saw how almost all students had rallied up against their claim. "Fine, whatever. I guess we can debate a little before we do anything.", and with that he crossed his arms and looked at us expectantly.

"We're just wasting our time...", mumbled Tooth with a venom in her voice that honestly hurt me a little. Why...? Why was Tooth so bitter? Was she... close to North?

"So... we're debatin'?", asked Aster, looking annoyed. "Fine, but what will we debate, then?"

Right. We had to start somewhere...

"Actually, I'd like to hear an overview of the incident first.", said Peter as he spoke to all of us. "Since we weren't the first on the scene, we're not entirely sure what happened."

"Oh yeah... We're kinda in the dark in that regard, no, sis?", said Anna as she looked at Elsa with an embarrassed smile.

"Alright.", I spoke while I nodded, "I will, uh, do the overview, if that's OK..."

No one objected. I cleared my throat and after exhaling to psyche myself, I began speaking:

\_Well, everything started when Jack and I heard a loud noise. It instantly woke us up and since we were obviously curious about it, we went to investigate. When we got to the lobby, we found out that we weren't the only ones that had heard the noise. \_\_\*\*Fishlegs, Aster, the Twins, Flynn, Tooth, Merida and Rapunzel were also there.\*\*\_

"Who was the first one to get to the scene?", asked Peter suddenly.

"Hmm... when I got to the scene... \*\*Aster was the first one.\*\*", said Flynn as he closed his eyes in concentration. The Ultimate Survivalist nodded in response.

\_After that, we all noticed we had missed Monobear's Lesson. We were, of course, curious about that noise, but given the threat the Headmaster had given us, we made going to the Great Hall our first priority. And... well, that's when we discovered North's body; as soon as we opened the doors, we found the... scene and then that \_\_\*\*announcement\*\*\_\_ thing rang. After that, you guys arrived and that's... pretty much what happened before the investigation started.\_

With that, I finished outlining the case. Even though I had just explained things, this whole case didn't seem any clearer to us; confused expressions reigned the courtroom.

But I had something in my mind...

I turned to face the Headmaster, who was eating a fish despite the fact that he was a plush toy.

"U-uh... Monobear. I have a question..."

"Well, shoot! H-Hiccy I... I-I don't think we're ready to take our relationship to \_that\_ level...!", said Monobear as he spouted even more ridiculous nonsense. I sidestepped his bait and went straight to the core of the matter.

"I've been wondering... what is that thing that always rings whenever we find a body? H-how does it even work?"

"Hmm... I guess I never DID tell you...", started the Headmaster as he crossed his arms and closed his eyes in contemplation. "OK, allow me to explain! That announcement is just one of my teacher duties in this Camp Trip of Mutual Killing; \*\*The Body Discovery Announcement!\*\*"

"It would suck if you guys didn't ever found out a killing had occurred, no? Which is why I devised this system! Whenever \*\*three or more different people \*\*find a corpse, a Body Discovery Announcement will be made and will be played through all the camp for everyone to hear!"

After he said that, the Headmaster did a silly little bow in his seat, looking extremely pleased with himself. "No need to thank your Headmaster! I'm a very modest and pretty much all-around amazing bear!"

"Ugh, no one would've want to thank ya', ya stupid plush toy...", said Merida with a groan.

"Seriously. Keep your fucking comments to yourself...", added Snotlout with a frown.

"But still, this is useful information...", started Elsa. "Now we know more about the rules this boorish doll is following."

Yeah, I had the feeling... this was important information. I'd better not forget this.

"O-Ok... so are we all up to speed in what happened before the body was discovered?", asked Fishlegs. Everyone either nodded or murmured a "yeah".

"Alright. So can we start debating the actual killing?", asked Flynn as he tapped his foot impatiently.

"But, uh... where do we start?", asked Ruff, while her brother shrugged his shoulders in answer, which earned him a punch from the blonde girl.

"How about the cause of death?", suggested Jack, much to everyone's surprise.

"What, so a dragon attack isn't a good enough cause of death for you?", jeered Flynn.

"Flynn Rider, keep your mouth shut, please!", shouted Rapunzel suddenly with an authority I had never heard from her, and to my surprise, Flynn actually complied. Since when did Rapunzel had such leverage on Flynn?

"So... you're saying the cause of death ain't the dragon attack wounds?", said Merida with her head tilted, her confused face somewhat obscured by locks of red hair.

"That is correct." answers Pitch, "It is especially puzzling because the Monobear File makes no mention of it."

"So what?", shouted Tuff.

"Yeah I mean... the cause of death is kinda obvious, no?", continued Ruff.

"Really?", asked Elsa with a slightly arched eyebrow, "Then what was it? Because there's a lot of wounds on North's body; I'd be surprised if you two, of all people, were able to figure out which one was the one who did North in."

"So... all we have to do is figure out which one was the real cause of death?", said Fish to the Ultimate Figure Skater.

"That's right.", I answered in her place.

"But there's a lot of wounds on 'tis here body, ankle-biter.", commented Aster. "Is it even possible to figure out what the real fatal wound was?"

"Well... we can just start discussing all the wounds and drop the ones that we find to be unlikely, until we find the correct one!", said Jack as he pounded his fist on his open palm as his face brightened with the sudden realization.

"Hmm, that's actually a rather... bright idea for someone like you, you faker.", said Peter, much to the whitette's chagrin. Normally, I would be upset too... but somehow, that article kept popping up in my head and that... made me feel somewhat suspicious of Jack.

No... I cannot let those thoughts distract me from the trial. And... I felt very nasty whenever I started to suspect him... He was my friend all this time, and that file shouldn't change my feelings about him. I was still curious though... but for now...

"Let's do what Jack says.", I said as I nodded to the Ultimate Mystery, who beamed a silly smile at me. "It's a place to start."

"And I guess you are going to argue that the claw marks on his body are not the true wounds that killed North and that's why we're not going to discuss those yet?", said Tooth, looking extremely angry.

But I couldn't back down. I... mustered enough courage to glare back at her and nod in answer. The Ultimate Dentist, thankfully, backed off with just a scoff.

"So... if the wounds done by Toothless didn't do North in...", started Flynn. "Then which wound did?"

I wonder... there were a lot of wounds in the Ultimate Sculptor's corpse. Obviously, I wasn't going to even consider the wounds done by Toothless... and that only left the \*\*knife cut \*\*and the \*\*wounds on his chest.\*\* Well, taking in account the Monobear File, the only logical and possible cause of death was-

"I got it!" shouted Snotlout suddenly, looking extremely confident. "It was the \*\*the knife cut! \*\*That totally did him in!"

"And why do you think that, Snotlout?", asked Anna.

"Duh!", exclaimed Snotlout, "Because I, Snotlout, found the murder weapon that actually killed North!"

...OK... And to think things were going to go smoothly...

"What? Really?!" Rapunzel's face was one of awe as she saw the Ultimate Heavy Lifter sticking his chest out with pride.

"Well, spit it out already!", shouted Merida, impatient. With a dramatic flair, Snotlout produced a... wait... is that a \*\*combat knife\*\*...?

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter kept showing off as he spun the bladed weapon on his fingers before dropping it clumsily on the floor, much to the collective embarrassment of everyone as Snotlout hurried to pick the weapon back with a nervous smile.

"A-anyway...! Here it is! I, Snotlout, have found the murder weapon! It's this bloody combat knife!"

"Well, it does have blood on it...", commented Elsa.

"And it certainly looks stabby.", said Tuffnut with a dangerous glint in his eyes. "Yeah! And plus, the Monobear File does mention the knife cut so that has to be it, right?!", added Ruffnut, sporting the same look as her twin. We... have to make sure we hide that knife later.

"Where did you find it?!", demanded Tooth, making the burly teen flinch with fright. I would've laughed but I... was actually scared too by the Ultimate Dentist's sudden outburst.

"Oh, uh... behind the hotel!", Snotlout stumbled over his words as

Tooth trained her gaze on him, studying every word. "I-It was buried under all the bloodied snow and...!"

"Bloodied snow?!" shouted Anna. As expected, everyone's attention was drawn to that sentence. Snotlout apparently regretted wanting to show off as he squirmed under everyone's gaze, sweat visible on his brow.

"Y-yeah! There was a shitton of blood there where I found the knife! So that place has to be the real crime scene!", explained Snotlout, looking a bit unsure about his claim.

"So, we have the real murder weapon and the real crime scene..." Tooth's voice was quiet yet strong.

At the rate this was going... we were going to go completely off the mark. And yet... this was actually nice. Because if they started to believe that the knife was the true murder weapon... \*\*Toothless wouldn't be suspected anymore.\*\* I mean, obviously, dragons cannot hold weapons, so if we decided the knife was the real cause of death...

...Argh! What should I do?! I... don't believe the knife is the real murder weapon! But... if I point it out... The suspicion will fall back to Toothless... ! What... should I...?

Do I point that out or do I stay quiet...?

...

No... what am I thinking?! This... this isn't the correct way to do things! If I lie, I'm basically admitting that Toothless did it, and the only way he could be innocent is if I were to hide the truth. And I truly believe my bud didn't kill anyone.

...Gods, this is going to make everything harder, but... I won't conceal the facts. I'm sure the truth... will be one full of \*\*hope. \*\* I just have to be careful.

"But, wait a second...", started Rapunzel, her green eyes lighting up with relief. "If the knife is the murder weapon... then that means Toothless didn't kill North!"

Merida's face displayed a beaming smile, one rare for the red-head, as she heard Rapunzel speak. "Oi, that's true! If the knife is the real murder weapon, then that means the killer was human!"

Jack's face, full of happiness, as he looked at me to see my reaction... made this even harder than it should. But I already had decided, so with a gulp, I spoke.

"A-as... as much as I want that to be true... unfortunately, the knife can't be the murder weapon."

You could hear a pin drop in the room as everyone fell silent, either because of how outrageous my claim sounded, or because they couldn't believe I of all people had said that. Honestly, i couldn't believe I said that either.

Of course, the reaction in comparison was quite noisy.

"What?! Hic, what are you saying?!", Jack was obviously the first one to react, his expression the very definition of shock.

"Kiddo, are you hearing yourself?", said Flynn, looking beyond himself. "We just heard Snot tell us all this and it matches with the Monobear File! This knife \_has \_to be it, what killed North!"

"Or... did you find something wrong with our line of thought?", asked Peter, expectantly.

"Y-yeah...", I nodded, feeling a bit uncomfortable under the scrutinous gaze of the Ultimate Fear Expert. "The issue is... with the \*\*Monobear File itself.\*\*"

"What do you mean?", asked Elsa, tilting her head as she brought her hand to her chin.

"Well... see, the Monobear File quite clearly states that North had \*\*internal hemorrhaging\*\*.", I said as I pointed it out in my ElectroID. "D-don't you think that sounds more... like a possible cause of death than a simple knife cut?"

"...Oh.", Was all Snotlout could say as he realized his mistake. Looks like I hit the nail on the head.

"There's no way a knife cut could've killed North.", I continued. "I mean, the cut itself was neither deep nor big. It's impossible for this combat knife to be the true cause of death!"

"Ugh, really?", complained Tuff.

"Man, it looked so deadly and it can't even kill someone? Lame." finished Ruff as she gave the weapon a disgusted look. Snotlout hid the knife out of embarrassment. Geez... I hope he doesn't resent me for calling him out...

"But, Hiccup...", began Anna, as she twisted one of her braids nervously, "This combat knife has blood and North was indeed cut... there's no way this weapon isn't related to the crime, right?"

That... was true. If Toothless wasn't the killer (which he wasn't), then someone used this knife to injure our friend. "It has to be related to the case... even if its not the murder weapon."

"So... if the murder weapon isn't the knife..." and as I heard Tooth's voice, what I feared was gonna happen, well... happened. "Does that mean our only suspect is Toothless still?"

"I guess that's all it amounts too, yea', "said Aster as he scratched behind his ear, almost knocking out one of the feathers he wore on his hair. "Guess we all just wasted our darn time debatin' over nothing."

"See? I was right! This was all just a damn wild goose chase!", shouted Flynn as he pointed a finger at me.

"Not... exactly."

The Ultimate Thief, and myself and... well, everybody... turned to see Jack with his eyes closed, deep in thought. "You... you guys just said it... \*\*The knife has North's blood and it wounded him so... \*\*how can you guys even say that \*\*Toothless is the only suspect when he can't even wield the knife?\*\*"

I sincerely thanked Jack for his intervention. I shot the whitette an appreciative smile and seized this as my chance to turn things around.

"The knife is obviously tied to this case... and since Toothless cannot use it, then this only can mean one thing... \*\*Someone else, a person, was the culprit!\*\*"

"T-that doesn't mean Toothless didn't kill North!", shouted Tooth, looking flustered. "A-all you've proved is that the knife didn't... didn't kill him! F-for all we know...", a tear threatened to escape the rainbow-haired girl's eye. "Toothless could still have killed him and he could've... yeah, an accomplice! That person must have used the knife!"

...Oh, crud.

"She does have a valid point.", said Elsa.

"T-that's what I thought too!", exclaimed Fishlegs and I could swear I saw Jack glare at the Ultimate Encyclopedia with restrained anger. "A-an accomplice would most certainly explain the knife!"

...I-I thought we were doing well! How did we end up in this... mess?

"Incidentally, I have another question for the Headmaster...", began Peter as he directed his gaze towards the black and white bear, who was playing with the fish bone of his meal. "Are there any... special rules in case an accomplice turns up?"

"Gee, you guys do have a lot of questions today! But don't worry, Headmaster Monobear will satiate your curiosity with a spoonful of information!", said the bear as he raised his paw and the fish bone as if it were a sword. "Um, let's see here... certainly, accomplices are allowed in this Camp Trip of Mutual Killing buuut... assisting in a crime \*\*has no benefit at all!\*\*"

...Huh?

"What I mean is... the accomplice can go on a murder rampage or whatever but only the true \*\*Blackened, the mastermind behind the crime, \*\*will reap the benefits! That is to say, only the Blackened will escape even if the culprit and the accomplice manage to fool everyone at the Class Trial! Plus, if the Blackened gets discovered in the Class Trial... the \*\*accomplice will also be punished along with the Blackened\*\*!"

Peter nodded at the new information. I see...

"So... what you're basically saying is... there's no way an accomplice could ever exist, right? I mean, you gain nothing from it... so...", I began.

"So that must mean there's no accomplice in this case either, right?!", shouted Jack as he smiled at me earnestly.

"No. That is not necessarily the case...", began Elsa, "We did not know about this particular rule until today's trial; an accomplice could still exist because they had no idea of this rule."

Right, the possibility of an unwilling accomplice is strong... but I don't think we're dealing with this correctly.

...

"So, uh... where does this leave us again?", asked Snotlout, looking a bit lost.

"We've been talking about this knife, like, forever, and now I don't even know what's going on anymore.", said Tuff while he clutched his head in frustration.

Right. Whether an accomplice was involved or not is not important right now; we can come to that later. Right now, we're trying to figure out what killed North.

"Well, we just dismissed the combat knife as the murder weapon, so we need to move on and find the true murder weapon.", I began fiddling with the ElectroID as everyone nodded and did the same. "Seeing the Monobear File, the only other wound remaining is-

"I got it!", shouted Tuffnut, and I got this sinking feeling... "See? It was right there in front of us, the cause of death is that \*\*foreign substance!\*\*"

"Are you trying to have a second moment of glory or something...?", grumbled Flynn as he shook his head.

"But foreign substance... does that mean like, imported beer?", asked Snotlout as he scratched his brown hair.

"No, you dunderhead! It means somethin' akin poison!", said Merida, seemingly fed up by Snotlout's previous blunder.

I looked back to my Monobear File. Indeed, the autopsy report did say that... but... did that kill North?

"Hmm, in some case, poison does cause internal bleedin'. Nasty business, if ya ask me...", commented Aster with a grunt.

"So, that must be it, no? This time, we're right! The poison killed North!", exclaimed Anna with a twinkle on her eyes.

"And if that poison is the murder weapon... then Toothless is innocent! There's no way a dragon could've made North \*\*drink \*\*the poison!", said Rapunzel, looking relieved again.

"What if the dragon has poison in its claws and teeth, though?!", retorted Tooth, to which Flynn nodded.

"No.", I wasn't going to let that idea fly. "Night Furies don't have poison on them. They mostly rely on hit-and-run strikes from above and their plasma breaths."



"I-it's true...", said Snotlout, looking embarrassed from some reason. "I... I've been bitten by the stupid gecko and I didn't die from poisoning or anything so that can't be it."

I had to resist the urge of joining Jack's snickering and Toothless' odd proud smile.

"Still, I find this odd.", started Fishlegs. "Where in the world did a \*\*combat knife \*\*and \*\*poison\*\*? We were trapped in that resort for days and we didn't have anything on us save our ElectroIDs..."

"Isn't it obvious? The killer sneaked them in!", asserted Ruffnut.

"No, I'm pretty sure they came from the... Final Dead Room.", I said. Yeah, that had to be it. I personally saw the Octagon and what it contained.

"Eep?! From there?!", shouted Fish, looking aghast.

"Wasn't that the creepy room with the skull on its door?! The one that Monobear said it had a Life-or-Death game or something?!", asked Anna. I nodded.

"Y-yeah... I... I personally confirmed that fact." Gods, I hate when everyone looks at me like that...! But I knew this was going to happen; I just had to bear it while I explained my reasoning. I mean, I risked my life... so we could survive, after all. "There's a room hidden inside the Final Dead Room. It's called the Octagon."

I was gesturing once again, waving my hand around as I spoke. A nervous habit. "Inside the Octagon... Monobear prepared a lot of weapons... and there was indeed a lot of knives and poison in there as well."

"But what makes you think the killer got them from there?!", shouted Tooth, her anger never subsiding as she desperately clung to the fact that Toothless had been the culprit. This was... dangerous. If I don't convince her fast enough, she could blind herself to the truth.

I took a deep breath.

"Because... there was a \*\*missing knife \*\*and, among the many poisons, there was one that looked like it was \*\*used.\*\*"

"You mean this one?!", exclaimed Monobear suddenly as he threw a small bottle towards me with incredible speed. To say that I yelped in surprise was an understatement. Literally catching the bottle as if my life depended on it, I held it to my chest until I made sure I had it in a firm grasp. Slowly, I lifted it to my face, and what I was expecting to see was resting on my palm.

"Dimethylheptylpyran", I read out loud.

"Is the fishbone having a seizure?", asked Snotlout as he heard me said the poison's name.

"No, you idiot, Hiccup is obviously readin' the label on that there bottle!", retorted Merida.

"Monobear, explain yourself.", demanded Peter, as he gave the grinning mascot a scathing glare. "What did you give Haddock?"

"Why, dear Pitchy... I just gave Hiccy the poison you guys were talking about!", said the Headmaster in a dismissing tone. "What's wrong with that?"

"You dumbass!", shouted Flynn as he frantically looked at the bottle in my hand and the Headmaster. "If that thing broke, we could've had died!"

"Buh-wha?", exclaimed Monobear as he tilted his head at the brown-haired teen. "Don't be ridiculous. Dimethylheptylpyran is not **\*\*lethal\*\***! Well, at least, not in the dose I prepared."

"Wait, what?!", said Jack as he visibly relaxed and tore his gaze from me. W...was he worried about me ?

"Dimethylheptylpyran is a poison, yes, but it's main use is for **\*\*sedative purposes\*\***! Sure, it can kill you if you apply a large dose and I guess it can get on your clothes or something because of **\*\*sticky \*\***it is... but that thing was kinda hard to come by, so I could only get what was in that small bottle resting in Hiccy's hands!", explained the Headmaster as he spun on his throne with glee.

"So... this poison is not the murder weapon." I concluded. I was hoping this was it; after all, poison does sometimes cause internal bleeding and if poison was the cause of death, then there was no way Toothless was the killer, much less an accomplice. So much for that...

"Aw, c'mon! I thought that was it!", complained Tuffnut. "Of course that wasn't it, you're too dumb to crack this case.", said Ruffnut as she pushed her brother around and before we all know it, they start beating each other up. As always.

"Still... that poison has to have something to do with this case.", said Rapunzel, "I mean... it was on North's blood, right? So that means someone poisoned him..."

"... I got it!", shouted Jack as he snapped his fingers, a knowing smile playing on his lips. "Hey, Snot! Give me that knife!"

"Huh? Oh... sure-"

"Wait! Don't throw it at me, you dumbass!", shouted Jack as he put his hands in front of him, just in case the Ultimate Heavy Lifter decided to actually finish the action of throwing the sharp blade at the whitette. Thankfully, Snotlout lowered his arm and instead gave the knife to his neighbor. In due time, it was passed to Jack, who upon receiving the knife, stared intently at the blade, which was still coated with blood... Now... hold on... why is it still coated in blood?

The whitette put his finger on the blood and before we could ask what he was doing, he had wiped a portion of the crimson liquid with a

quick motion.

The blood stuck Jack's finger as if it were some kind of red jelly. Blood \_definitely \_didn't do that.

"I knew it...", said Jack with a bright smile. "This knife... and the Dimet-whatever were \*\*used in \*\*\*\*conjunction\*\*!"

"What do you mean?', asked Peter, looking at Jack with... less disdain than usual. If I could put it in words, I'd say he was looking at the whitette with... respect?

Jack continued his explanation, excitement clear in his face. "Well, Monobear said that Dimethyl-whatever that thing is... is \*\*sticky\*\*, no? Well, the blood in this thing is sticky as well. This means that the knife was most likely... coated in Dimethy- you know what I mean!"

"Really?!", shouted Snotlout, looking pale. I guess he got scared once he knew he was holding a poisoned weapon so carelessly.

Jack nodded. "Yeah! And I mean, it makes sense! The killer probably grabbed this knife and the poison and then assaulted North on the back of the hotel!"

"...It makes sense, too.", I continued, understanding where Jack was going with this. The whitette nodded at me, signaling me to go on, and I happily obliged. "Whoever our killer is... well, I'd think they'd have a hard time fighting North. So incapacitating him was the only choice they had. Which most definitely proves that our killer is human too; after all, only humans can wield knives and apply poison to them!"

"Also... with this, we can \*\*discount the back of the hotel as the scene of the murder.\*\*", continued Jack. "The only thing that happened there was the scuffle and the incapacitation of North... the real scene of the murder is most definitely the \*\*Great Hall.\*\*"

With that, the whitette finished, looking incredibly proud of himself. Of course, everyone looked a little... stunned. Still, I could see it in their faces... they were slowly buying into Jack's logic; even Tooth was calming down a little, her anger diminishing as she mulled over those facts we just established.

"And? so what?"

Aster's voice broke the silence as everyone stared at him, Jack's face one of confusion.

"Okay, I got ya'... you're sayin' the beast didn't kill 'im because he couldn't have poisoned North with that knife... but so what? As everyone has told you, the knife ain't the murder weapon, ya dingus! That still means the dragon could've killed North after the accomplice cut North!"

"...Oh.", was all Jack could say in his defense.

"Also... there's the fact about North's body. How did it end up on the Great Hall?", he asked, his green eyes zeroing on Jack's nervous

face as the whitette's eyes darted here and there as he tried to come up with an explanation. "I'd say the dragon took North's body, and \*\*flew\*\* to the Great Hall. There, the deed was done."

The Ultimate Survivalist smiled smugly. "There, we now have proof the bloody beast did the poor bloke in. Happy now, ya snowflake?"

Jack grunted, looking a little beyond himself.

But no... Aster was wrong... I couldn't let him turn the tide on us.

"That is impossible, Aster.", I began, which made the silver-haired teen look at me. "Toothless \*\*can't fly.\*\* His tail fin being damaged prevents him from doing so."

"But it had to be the dragon!", interjected Fishlegs. "I-I mean... Toothless is probably the only one among us who could've carried North with ease! So... he had to be the only one capable of moving North's body."

...

I... I guess that IS true. I doubt any of us gathered here could've had moved North's gargantuan corpse. And yet...

"Don't you find that a bit odd, though?", began Elsa. "Mr. Ingerman, there were no drag marks nor footprints on the scene signaling the fact that a body had been moved. And since Toothless cannot fly, the only way to carry a body would have been to walk to the Great Hall."

"But... that sounds like somethin' impossible!", said Merida as she scratched her head through her tangled red hair.

"I mean, the body did end up in the \*\*Great Hall despite the fact that North was incapacitated behind the Hotel...\*\* so it must be possible, right?", asked Anna, trying to make sense of things.

...I guess I can't keep hiding this anymore. Not when I know the answer to this mystery... I think. I'll handle everyone else's reactions later, for now I have to press onward.

"It is possible.", I began, and as suspected, everyone instantly turned to look at me. "I-I mean, I also verified this personally. You... you could move the body without leaving any tracks or flying if you... do something."

"And what is that, Mr. Haddock?", queried Elsa, her cold gaze trained on me.

"If... if you win at the \*\*Final Dead Room... \*\* \*\*You get a special privilege aside from access to weapons. You get... unlimited access to a series of secret passages.\*\*"

"L-like in a spy movie?", asked Fish, looking strangely excited over this revelation. I nodded at the Ultimate Encyclopedia before continuing.

"I found it odd, you know... the secret passages lead to various

places in the resort. Specifically, the secret passages connect \*\*the Great Hall, the Hotel Lobby, the MiM Library, and... the forest behind the Hotel.\*\*"

"C'mon, ankle-biter... don't lie. A secret passage, really? Ya must have hit your head or somethin' because things like that don't exist." said Aster, shaking his head at me with a look of disappointment on his face.

"He is not lying.", interjected Peter. "After all, both Jack and I bore witness to that... isn't that right, phony?"

Jack ignored the obvious jab, instead putting on a look on concentration until he looked like he had realized something, his eyebrows shooting up. "Ah! Yeah! Hiccup did appear suddenly \*\*from within a wall in the Great Hall despite the fact that he had left for the Final Dead Room!\*\*"

"W-wait... the Final Dead Room?", asked Anna as she looked at me worriedly. "Are you saying Hiccup went there and..."

"Oh? Y-yeah, I-I... I had to investigate there so I went into the Final Dead Room and... uh, challenged it. Yeah, and...", I said rather awkwardly as the brunette trained her eyes on me, feeling rather conscious of my appearance.

"I see... so that is why you know so much about this room. You defeated the Final Dead Room.", mumbled Elsa as she saw her sister looking at me with a... happy expression that only intensified as Elsa kept talking about my victory over the room. Is it me, or does Elsa get rather moody whenever Anna interacts with me? What is her problem?

"Y-yeah, I did... and apparently, I wasn't the only one who went through that.", I answered as I looked at the Headmaster, ignoring everyone's questioning glance. "Isn't that right, Monobear?"

"Sheesh! Will you guys keep asking me questions! What am I, some sort of Super Hint giver or something?! If this were a videogame, I'd deplete your Health Bar for pestering the judge... you know, like in that famous game series, Ace Att-"

"Ugh, just shut up and tell us what Hiccup is talking about!", Monobear's tirade was thankfully interrupted by Flynn. Looking a bit dejected, the Headmaster continued on, his tone of voice carrying a melancholic one.

"Uuu... Fine. Yes, Hiccy wasn't the only one who went through the Final Dead Room. \*\*There was someone else\*\* that came before him and won access to my marvelous Octagon and all it's wondrous benefits."

"So, what you're sayin' is", began Merida, "Hiccup! Are ya sayin' one of us went through that awful room before you and that is how they pulled off this crime?!"

"Yeah.", was all I could say. "It's the only way it makes sense."

"Hic must be right." Jack said as he crossed his arms, deep in thought. "The knife, the poison, the moving of the body... those things could only have been done or obtained if someone went to the Final Dead Room."

"Why would someone go through all that trouble and danger...?", asked Tooth, who looked less angry but still distraught.

"My guess is... they were aiming for the **\*\*Ultimate Weapon\*\*** that laid inside the Final Dead Room.", I said to the Ultimate Dentist. "I mean, the only reason someone would have to go through all that danger is... well, obviously, th-they were planning on murdering someone."

"Which is why... Toothless can't be the killer. None of these convoluted steps would have been possible for him. Only... a person would have the need to procure a weapon and an incapacitator and a way to move around undetected."

"Yeah, animals are stupid, after all. They can't plan that far along.", added Tuffnut after I finished speaking.

"Not like you're any better." followed Ruffnut with a snide snicker.

"S-so... what you're saying is that... Toothless was just being... framed...?", asked Tooth, her voice breaking a bit as her eyes got a bit watery.

Inside of me, I sighed with relief. It seems, we finally managed to break through her. Maybe with this... we'll have more breathing space. With this, surely there is none in this courtroom who still thinks Toothless is the kill-

"Hold it there, ankle-biter."

Aaaaand I knew there was going to be something. There always is. Aster was the one who spoke up.

"That the bloody beast... isn't completely innocent! I mean... he had to have moved the body! And did ya forget?! Toothless did inflict wounds on North's body!"

...Unfortunately, he was right. Some way or another, Toothless got involved in this crime. I couldn't deny that. Not if I wanted to find out the truth. With that resolve in my heart, I face Aster with the bravest face I could.

Why could I face him like that? Because I believed in Toothless' innocence. In my friend. And because... I **\*\*knew\*\***. I knew the Night Fury had been involved in this crime **\*\*unwillingly\*\***.

"You're right, Toothless did participate in the crime... but that doesn't mean he's the killer.", I began.

Yeah. It made sense now. What we discussed at the beginning of the trial... the possibility of an accomplice.

"You see, Toothless did participate in the crime... but he wasn't a willing accomplice. And I have proof."

"Back in the Final Dead Room, I discovered something very unusual; \*\*garden beds full of plants.\*\*"

"Well, that IS very strange.", commented Rapunzel. "I didn't take the Headmaster for a botanist."

"Heh, maybe he's just a pansy in the inside.", said Flynn.

"Hey! You don't see me commenting on your lame-ass goatee, so I'd keep your mouth shut, Flynny!", retorted Monobear, waving his arms around as if he were annoyed.

"I-in any case...", I continued, a bit off-put by the... um, peanut gallery. "What I found in those garden beds was very peculiar. For you see, in that garden bed... I found plants endemic to Berk."

"Aaand? How is that even important? Like, why should we care about plants that only grow in your boring Viking village?", asked Ruffnut.

"The, uh, important part is... the fact that plants native to Berk have an \*\*effect on reptiles, including dragons.\*\*" Seriously! Stop interrupting me!

"I-I'll cut the chase. In that garden bed, I found a plant called \*\*Dragonsbane, which has the particular effect of making dragons submissive and willing to follow orders.\*\*"

Peter's face brightened up a little as he heard me. "I see... so what you are suggesting is..."

"Yeah...", I continued. "I'm most certain that... someone used these plants to force Toothless to \*\*cooperate in their plan!\*\*"

Aster looked aghast. But he recovered quickly. "But, mate... there's no way the killer could've known about that! Only you could've known about it!"

I shook my head. "No, that's wrong. In the Final Dead Room, there were signs in front of the garden beds which dictated \*\*the effects of all plants\*\*. With that, anyone could've know what those plants did!"

Once again, the Ultimate Survivalist was at a loss for words.

"B-But, Hiccup!", Fishlegs interjected. "Even if that is true... that doesn't mean Toothless didn't kill anyone! I mean... couldn't this person force your dragon to kill using these plants! I'm 80% sure that's why North had those wounds in him... because Toothless k-killed him...!"

"No, that doesn't make sense.", answered Jack, making the Ultimate Encyclopedia gulp. "I mean... \*\*Why would someone do all of this? \*\*Like... Only the person that kills \*\*gets to leave\*\*... so... if they truly wanted to escape... why make Toothless do the killing blow? If they did that, the one with \*\*the right to leave would be Toothless, not the one who ordered the Night Fury to finish the job

off.\*\*"

"So you're saying that the animal attack-like wounds... were inflicted post-mortem?", asked Elsa, looking impressed by Jack's deductions.

"It would make sense...", said Tooth, brightening even more. Her lab coat billowed a bit as she raised her arm. "Hiccup is correct; if someone controlled the dragon, then they did so to move the body and create a fake cause of murder! Otherwise, if they let Toothless fin-finish North off, \*\*all they would have done would be for nothing!\*\*"

"Plus, since the real killer knew about the plants, got the knife and the weapon, attacked North with them, and had the secret tunnels accessible to them... Yeah, all of those actions sounds like something only a person could do!", summarized Rapunzel.

"They probably also ordered Toothless to move the body through the tunnels... God, that's one slimy bastard, ya hear? That's a devious plan if I ever heard one...", added Rapunzel.

"So that means... Toothless is definitely not the killer!", finished Jack with a grin.

No one said anything, not even Flynn, Fishlegs or Aster. Or it was more like... They couldn't. In light of this evidence and reasoning, they couldn't find any fault or way to refute anything.

Which was good. We finally managed to clear Toothless of all innocence. But that still left us with two very big questions.

What was the \*\*true cause of death\*\*?

and...

Who is the \*\*true killer\*\*?

I... I had my suspicions already. Because... Because \*\*that person\*\*... has been behaving strangely. But I shouldn't jump to conclusions just yet... Because now... now I'm sure.

We're slowly making our way... to \*\*the truth\*\*.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-Intermission-<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobear Theater<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Life is full of what-ifs. [This is totally not a recycled line, puhuhuhu!]"<p>

"You know... like... what would have happened if I had ordered vanilla ice cream instead of chocolate?"



"Would that have made me score with that pretty girl? Would I have fallen madly in love with her? Would I have asked her hand in marriage after getting really close? What if we got married and then we had three wonderful children? What if we led happy, fulfilling lives without any worries? What if we died peacefully and still as madly in love as when we first met?"

"As I wondered this, the chocolate ice cream cone in my hand melted."

"\*Sigh\*... What if I hadn't started to wonder about what-ifs? Would I still have my ice cream intact?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

After one of Monobear's... weirdly imposed breaks, we started our debating again.

I was relieved, honestly. After all of that, Toothless was finally cleared of all doubts. I had to hand it to Hic; he really was handling this Class Trial extremely well. Thanks to his bravery, he got a lot of information from the Final Dead Room, and it was definitely showing. Because of that, we can finally move on to the actual crux of the matter; **\*\*who actually killed Nick\*\***.

...I can see it on his face too. He looks more at ease now than at the beginning of the trial. But we can't relax yet. We have to give this everything we got... our lives depend on that.

"So, uh... what are going to discuss now?", asked Tuff, as usual.

"I think it's high time we started discussing the true cause of death.", said Elsa, giving the male Ultimate Demolition student a harsh look.

Hic nodded. "Yeah, since we discredited all the other wounds, then the only one left is..."

"The **\*\*three holes in North's chest\*\***.", I said as I looked over the Monobear File.

"I know! The killer probably stabbed someone with a really big fork!", declared Snot.

"I... don't think I even have to point out how wrong you are.", groaned Flynn.

"Then... maybe a trident?" suggested Tooth. "Was there something like that in the Final Dead Room, Hiccup?!"

The little Viking shook his head, much to Tooth's disappointment. "Actually...", began Hic, "I think I know how the Blackened... killed North." And as he said that, Hic took out the shoddy looking controller once again.

"What is that utterly decrepit looking contraption...?", asked Pitch as he gave the remote in Hic's eye a harsh glare.

"This...", said the Ultimate Lucky Student as he showed the controller to us all, "is the true murder weapon and the cause of death... \*\*The Final Dead's Room prize; the Ultimate Weapon.\*\*"

"You mentioned that before...", said Flynn as he rubbed his chin and looked at the contraption in Hic's hand. "But is that piece of crap actually able to kill someone?! I don't think you can even use it to bash someone with it!"

Hic looked at the controller with that same knowing gaze he had during the entire Class Trial. And then... I remembered that scene back at the Great Hall.

How... he looked \*\*between the controller and... at the space above North's body...\*\* where only \*\*the chandelier was...\*\*

"This remote control...", began Hic. "Is actually what activates the real \*\*Ultimate Weapon\*\*."

...

No way...

"Hic...", I said, interrupting the little Viking as I rubbed my forehead, "A-are you saying what really killed North is... the chandelier in the Great Hall?!"

Hic looked genuinely surprised at my sentence, but he nodded at me slowly before speaking. "Y-yeah... That's... right..."

So... then... but... that's crazy!

And yet...

"Wait, hold on, a chandelier killin' someone?! What does that have to do with the controller in Hiccup's hands?!", asked Merida as she looked between us, clearly lost.

"Does that chandelier turn into a robot or something?!", squealed Fish as he looked at the poorly-constructed remote with renewed interest.

Hic awoke from his shock at that comment. "W-what? No! U-uh... as I was saying... this remote control probably activates a mechanism inside the chandelier. When you press the button on it... it probably \*\*put the chandelier into a free-fall...\*\*"

A free-fall... wait... if a chandelier that big were to fall... and...

I could feel my mind working at a speed that I wasn't used to. Was this because I had gotten used to these Class Trials...?

"And what is your basis for that claim, Mr. Haddock?", asked Elsa.

All of a sudden, it clicked in my mind.

If something that big falls...

"\*\*The loud noise we heard in the morning!\*\*", I shouted far louder than I had intended. But I didn't care. That had to be it! "That's what we heard this morning!"

"W-what?!", shouted Fish, looking shocked.

"So that's what it was. No wonder we heard it. That thing was pretty big; of course it would make a ruckus if it fell!", said Flynn as he scratched his facepalmed.

Hiccup nodded and smiled as everyone started to see his point.

"OK, mates, that's a lotta imagination!", interjected Bunny. "A chandelier fell and killed North? And because of that controller thingamajig? There's no proof of that!"

"And yet, it makes sense...", began Pitch. "Taking into account the \*\*position of North's body... \*\*You'll definitely see that \*\*it was right under the chandelier\*\*."

"Oh yeah! I saw that!", shouted Snot excitedly. "I remembered because that's where those fucking \*\*wall were, the ones Monobear was hiding behind when giving those lessons\*\*!"

Hic nodded at Snotlout. "You guys will recall... that those wall were destroyed when we found the body. Walls that even resisted \*\*a Night Fury's attack\*\*. It would take something extremely powerful or heavy to destroy them... and the chandelier fits the bill."

"The reason why North's body was found under the chandelier... was probably because that's where he was killed. He had to be under it for the Ultimate Weapon to work.", added Elsa.

"Dude, if someone were to be under that thing if it fell... they would totally die!", exclaimed Ruff.

"And that chandelier definitely had some spiky ends... it probably... \*\*punctured North's chest\*\* when it fell on him...", said Anna.

I understand now... "The Blackened was really devious... He probably used Toothless to put North's body on top of the walls; they weren't very tall to begin with."

"Frostbite, that ain't possible!", interrupted Aster. "I mean, how could the killer know where Toothless was?"

"And now that you ask that, where was he at the time of the crime?", asked Elsa.

"He... was in... Jack's room.", said Hic, whose cheeks suddenly turned a bit red, "W-with me."

Everyone, thankfully, didn't comment on that, even though I swear I saw Mer and Punzie grin like idiots and Flynn chuckle.

"See?! The killer couldn't have known that! 'sides, if you two were there, you would've noticed if the dragon was gone, right?"

I gulped. "A-actually... Hic and I were \*\*asleep for who knows how long\*\*... so anybody could've come and used the Dragonsbane without

us noticing."

"They could've done so easily too.", Added Tooth. "Since the doors of our hotel rooms **\*\*don't have locks\*\***." And as she said that, I saw a blush creep on her cheeks. Somehow, I had an idea about how she learned about that fact. But this wasn't the time for that.

"See, Bunny?", I said, with a rather smug grin might I add, to the stunned Ultimate Survivalist, "There's no issue then. It is possible for someone to control Toothless. After doing so, they just had to order the Night Fury to move North's corpse and..."

"Was press the button and the deed would've be done. They didn't even need to be close to the crime scene. As long as they were in range they could've used the remote with ease.", continued Hic as he nodded at me with a grin.

"This theory even... **\*\*matches with the Monobear File\*\***!", I said as I pointed out the autopsy report. "See? **\*\*Internal hemorrhaging\*\***? If something that big fell on you, I'm sure you'd be bleeding inside badly." I said, feeling proud of myself for being able to remember the meaning of that term. "After that, all they had to do was order Toothless to attack the corpse to throw off the real cause of death."

Hic smiled after I finished talking. "And... that's the real cause of death: **\*\*A falling chandelier aptly named the Ultimate Weapon\*\***."

...

The silence that followed was one of consent. Even the rebellious ones, Flynn, Fishlegs and Aster stayed silent. This had to be it. I did a mental fist-pump motion in my head; Yes! Mystery solved!

And now all that is left...

"Ugh... if you amantes are done with that gross display...", spoke Monobear as he looked at us with a sad expression, "I'd say it's about darn time you started discussing the **\*\*Blackened's identity\*\***! I mean, sure, hearing you identify the true murder weapon and cause of death was enlightening but come on! No one cares about that stuff!", said Monobear as he angrily looked at us. "What the audience wants is, aside from me, the identity of the one whodunit!"

Monobear was, sadly, right. If we can't figure out who the killer is, then all of this will be for nothing. So we need to do that now...

But were do we start?

"That's fucking easy for you to say.", complained Snot, "You already know who the culprit is..."

"Well, there's nothing to it.", shrugged Flynn. "So, if the obvious one, Toothless isn't the culprit... then that leaves us with...?"

"Is it even possible to identify the culprit?", began Fishlegs. "I mean... any of us could've gone to the Final Dead Room!"

"That is indeed true...", began Pitch as devious grin spread on his face. "But that's precisely how we will discover who the culprit is."

"What do you mean?", asked Punzie.

"What I mean is... the culprit has to be the one that \*\*went \*\*to the Final Dead Room while we all were asleep. In other words... the one \*\*that didn't have an alibi at the time \*\*is most likely our culprit."

"But...", I began. "At the very least, nine of us have alibis."

"And why is that?", asked Pitch, looking confrontational again.

"Because... \*\*nine of us \*\*discovered the body. At the very least, I'm sure that the ones we met at hotel lobby are innocent."

"We were all together at the time, so I don't think any of the guys in our group did North off.", explained Merida.

"So that leaves the ones that weren't present as the only suspects...", said Tooth.

"But is that really fair?", whined Anna. "I mean... the only reason you guys even have an alibi is because \*\*of that loud noise. Elsa, Snotlout, Peter, and I didn't hear it.\*\*"

"You know, I've been wondering... you guys keep talking about hearing this really loud noise but... I didn't even hear a thing!", said Snoutlout as he tilted his head, trying to think.

"That's... weird. We definitely heard a noise, though...", I said, as everyone else who were with us at the time nodded. "So why the discrepancy...?"

After some hard thinking, the little Viking spoke up. "Wait a second... I see! So \_that's \_what it was...!"

"Guys... it's because of \*\*our rooms!\*\*", exclaimed Hic.

"Oh... I see now.", said Peter with a chuckle. "Of course... that explains why I did not hear anything. I forgot the Super Deluxe and Deluxe Rooms are \*\*soundproof\*\*."

"So no matter if that chandelier fell, we wouldn't have heard it because of we were staying in our rooms? lame.", said Snotlout, looking disgruntled.

"Well, I'm glad that got resolved.", said Anna, looking pleased. "At least that also provides us with an alibi; We didn't come out of the rooms because \*\*we couldn't hear the noise at all.\*\*"

"But if that is true...", said Punzie with a shaking voice..."Then everyone has a \*\*solid alibi\*\*, right?"

...

...

Wait...

...Everyone...?

Hic, Bunny, Tooth, Flynn, Mer, Punzie, the Twins, Fish and I...

We came out of **our rooms** because we **heard** that loud noise**.**

Pitch, Elsa, Anna and Snout...

They didn't come out of **their rooms** **because** they **couldn't** heard the noise**.**

All of this... seems to be true. Under those conditions, everyone indeed has a solid alibi.. And yet... under those conditions... something seems **off**... something... or someone **doesn't** fulfill **the conditions** established above...

That person... there's a person in those two groups that doesn't belong... yeah! That person's alibi is not valid...

I turned to face the person whose alibi stunk, and after taking a deep breath, I spoke.

"Bunny."

The Ultimate Survivalist looked at me with an unamused gaze. 'What do ya want, frostbite?'

"You... you said **you** came out of your room because you heard that loud noise**,** right?"

The Ultimate Survivalist looked at me before nodding. "Yeah. I mean, it's only natural, no?"

...I knew it.

I shook my head. "No. That is **impossible**."

I didn't know why... I didn't know what this meant... but I had to go through with this.

"And why is that?", challenged Bunny, glaring at me, "A loud noise rings through the place and ya tellin' me its impossible to hear it?"

I nod, much to the silver-haired teen's surprise. "Yes. It should have been impossible for you to hear. Because... you were staying at a **Super Deluxe Room, a soundproof room**. So... tell me, Bunny... how did you hear that noise?!"

To say that Bunny was stunned would be an understatement. The Ultimate Survivalist actually started to struggle to say something, a thing that I never saw him do.

Hic's eyes suddenly started to burn with subdued rage as he saw Bunny

stutter. "You... You heard that noise because you weren't in your room, didn't you...? Aster... did you...?!"

"No way...!", shouted Flynn as soon as he caught up with my line of reasoning, "I can't believe..."

"...Wait... if Aster heard the noise despite the fact that he was in a soundproof room... then, does that mean he was... somewhere else?", asked Anna, looking at the silver-haired boy with growing distrust.

"And... come to think of it... Aster was indeed the first one on the lobby, wasn't he? So... if he was there before any of us... then that means... his alibi falls apart!", shouted Tooth, her voice trembling as she spoke.

"...You did it... didn't you, Aster...?", asked Hic in a quiet voice. "U-unless you can explain what you were doing... then you're the only one who is suspicious."

The silver-haired boy's face remained stoic as the distrust in him grew, his sweat on his brow the only tell-tale sign that he was nervous.

A shaky laugh escaped his lips as he covered his eyes with his hand, a laugh that escalated in volume, his voice filling the courtroom with an unnerving mood. Finally, Aster lowered his hand as his laughter subsided, a look of incredulity across his face.

"Seriously, mate? You suspect me just because I was able to hear the chandelier fallin'?", he said as he laughed in a rather confident face at Hic's serious expression. "Just because I heard it, it doesn't mean I killed North! I was just in the lobby at the time, ankle-biter! It was just a coincidence, honest!"

"...Is that really true?", asked Pitch, looking unconvinced. To be fair, I wasn't convinced either. Bunn-... Aster simply laughed, before smiling again.

"Of course it's the truth!", he said as he looked at all of us. "C'mon, mates! Why are you still suspectin' me?! I mean, the only one that we know for sure went to the crime scene is that bloody beast! I \*\*never set foot on the crime scene and there ain't no proof about it\*\*!"

"Is that true? There weren't any clues on the crime scenes that pointed toward the culprit?!", asked Fishlegs as he looked at me and Hic desperately.

"No, there... wasn't.", said Hic, looking extremely pained as he admitted this. "A-at least... not in the Great Hall..."

"If there were, I would have found something. There wasn't anything but \*\*blood in the scene behind the hotel\*\*.", added Snotlout.

"Ya see?", said Aster with a smirk. "You guys almost jumped the gun! Seriously...", he said as he shook his head. "Weren't you blokes sayin' that we needed to dispel all doubts before votin'? And here you were jumpin' on me without havin' any \*\*damn

evidence\*\*."

...But... was that actually the truth?

I mean... I did find \*\*something on the crime scene behind the hotel\*\*... but was this piece of evidence even useful? Even though \*\*it was so small and insignificant\*\*?

...Should I go with through with this? I don't know where this will end... but I can't back down.

Aster has been acting strange during this Class Trial... and now, he lacks an alibi... He... he must be the Blackened.

So even if I'm totally wrong... so even if this piece of evidence is useless...

I... I must shoot through this contradiction, no matter how small! Because... that's how we'll find out the truth.

"Actually...", I began as I went to grab something from inside my pocket. "There was \*\*a piece of evidence that Snotlout didn't find\*\*..." and as I said that, everyone's eyes on me as I spoke, I began to second guess myself, "And that is... this!"

...

"What the fuck is that?"

As expected, it didn't take long before someone reacted to my piece of evidence. Snot eloquently said what everyone was thinking as they stared at the thing I was holding in my hand.

"This... is the thing that will point us to the killer.", I bluffed, "The... final piece of evidence."

"Jack, what the hell is that?", asked Mer as she squinted at the thing in my hand.

"This... is a... uh...", I began to stumble upon my words. "a \*\*piece of white... something. It's extremely small and, uh... it has some sort of weird coloring on one side. It's... also very hard, \*\*yeah\*\*..."

Flynn scoffed. "And this will point us to the killer \_how\_?"

...Yeah... I got nothing. I was... actually hoping I would come up with something in the interim between my bluff and everyone's reaction.

...And I didn't.

Aster smirked, though his face looked oddly stiff. "Hahaha, frostbite! Way to bluff! That thing ain't evidence, that's a piece of trash!"

"Wait a second."

Hic's voice resounded clear as he looked at the fragment in my



hand.

"I... I recognize that."

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Jack's latest piece of evidence.

That small fragment.

I had seen it somewhere before.

But... when I saw it before... that small white fragment... was  
\*\*part of something bigger.\*\*

"J-Jack...", I began, fully conscious of the fact that my voice was shaking. My mind gears were already working as theories spun inside my brain. "D-did you find that in the scene behind the hotel?"

The whitette, aptly confused, simply nodded in answer.

Something clicked inside my mind. This... this was it! With this... I could prove who the real killer was...!

"Jack's evidence... is actually what will decide the trial..." I began, much to everyone's astonishment. "Because that small fragment... actually points out to the culprit."

"You must be jokin'!", shouted Aster, looking a bit nervous through his smirk. "Will ya blokes stop bluffin'?! There's no way that trash has anything to do with the killer."

"But it does.", I insisted. "That small fragment was actually not always like that... before that... this fragment was part of something bigger, something whole... \*\*something the killer carried around \*\*\_\*\*always\*\*\_\_".\_

"What is it?!", shouted Tuffnut as he pushed his sister aside. "Out with it, what was it?!"

I drew a deep breath.

"This fragment is actually... \*\*a painted eggshell\*\*. And before that... it was obviously a \*\*whole painted egg\*\*!"

"Egg?!", exclaimed Fishlegs, reacting far more impressed than he should've.

"Wait a second... a painted egg?", began Flynn as he stared dumbfounded at the fragment in Jack's with renewed interest. "Yeah... yeah, I can see it...!"

"But... if that is the case... then... only one person in this room could have possessed a painted egg...", said Elsa as she processed the information.

"Wasn't that... Aster?", said Rapunzel, and I nodded at her.

Aster audibly grunted as he stared at me with a hint of fear.  
"Wha-... no! Y-you... you have it all wrong! That isn't...!"

"Since this was found in the crime scene where North was attacked... this proves you were there. Most likely, \*\*one of the eggs you always carry broke when North retaliated.\*\* The reason there wasn't any footprints in that crime scene was because \*\*you erased them as you looked for the broken eggshells\*\*... but of course, you ended up missing this one." I continued. I... I wasn't going to let him squirm his way out of this.

"Oi, ankle-biter... ya better stop that!", said Aster, his composure slipping. "I didn't... that thing ain't proof!", the Ultimate Survivalist tugged at one of the feathers clipped on his hair as he spoke. "Someone... could've planted that to frame me! That... that's still ain't proof enough to say I'm the killer!"

"Unfortunately, he does have a point.", commented Peter, who looked utterly bored. "So long as the possibility exist... no matter how pathetic the display, we can't say for sure he's the true killer."

"But is there even a way to prove without a shadow of a doubt that Aster is the killer?", asked Elsa.

"There has to be one.", said Jack as he kept staring at the nervous wreck that was the Ultimate Survivalist, "It's obvious he did it!"

Aster's shaky laugh filled the courtroom as he heard Jack's claim. "Well, ain't that rich, frostbite?! If you're so sure, then tell me...! How in tarnation are you goin' to prove I am the killer without a shadow of a doubt?! It's impossible! \*\*There ain't any more evidence\*\*!"

So long as Aster resists... we won't be able to finish this. I... despite how difficult it was for me to see someone I once admired like this... I had to do it.

Focusing more than I had ever done before in my life. I ran all the events in the previous days in my mind, looking for a hint; a clue; a solution. A way to prove that... that Aster... had killed North.

...

Flashes.

Memories.

Incidents.

Words.

Countless scenes, completely unrelated to each other quickly flashed by in my brain, containing information, feelings, happenings. Like a web of memories resonating in my synapses. And then... in a moment of lucidity...

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Hmm... I guess I never DID tell you...", started the Headmaster as he crossed his arms and closed his eyes in contemplation. "OK, allow me to explain! That announcement is just one of my teacher duties in this Camp Trip of Mutual Killing; <em>\_\*\*The Body Discovery Announcement!\*\*\_\_"

\_"It would suck if you guys didn't ever found out a killing had occurred, no? Which is why I devised this system! Whenever \_\_\*\*three or more different people \*\*\_\_find a corpse for the first time, a Body Discovery Announcement will be made and will be played through all the camp for everyone to hear!"\_

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>As I processed the gruesome scene in front of me<strong>\_\_, a single question left my lips.\_

\_Why? Why was... North dead? How can he be dead?\_

\_"\_\_\*\*What the hell?!""\*\*\_

\_\*\*"Oi, mate... you can't be serious..."\*\*\_

\_\*\*Jack's and Aster's voice \*\*\_\_snapped me out from my dazed state of mind as they walked to stand next to me, their faces displaying horror and disgust.\_

\_\*\*Soon after, Tooth's terrified scream followed as she witnessed the corpse of our departed friend. \*\*\_\_However, even that scream was drowned out by a bell and the odious voice of our Headmaster, whose cheerful tone completely ignored the grim scene that was occurring in front of us.\_

\_\*\*\*Ding dong ding dong\*\*\*\_

\_\*\*"A body has been discovered in the Great Hall! Following a short period of investigation, the Class Trial will begin!"\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...T-that's it! That's how I'll prove Aster was the killer!

...I can hardly believe I was even able to remember all that.

"There is a way to find out who the real killer is.", I began, once again earning a look of fear from the Ultimate Survivalist. "And this time, it will be definite proof."

"Perfect.", said Peter as he nodded at me. "Let us hear it."

"We'll figure it out... using the \*\*Body Discovery Announcement\*\*!", I said. Yeah... I'm confident now. This will definitely do it!

"And how will that help us figure out who the killer is?", asked Anna, tilting her head.

"It's actually rather simple." I began. "If you guys remember

correctly... the Body Discovery Announcement only plays whenever **three different people first discover a body**, right?", everyone nodded at my question. "So... that naturally means that Monobear probably doesn't count the **killer whenever they find the body**."

"Oh, that's right... technically speaking, the killer has already discovered the body before any of us, since they had to have seen it when they killed their victim...!", said Rapunzel as she clapped her hands with excitement.

"Right.", I consented, "So now, I have to ask... who were the **first ones to discover North's body**?"

"Hmm, that would have been...", began Jack as he put a finger to his temple, concentrating, "**Hic was the first... I was the second... the third one was Aster... and the fourth one was Tooth. After she screamed, the rest of our group ran into the scene.**"

Yeah, I remember that as well. "Correct. And now... for the final question... the one that will decide all... **When did the Body Discovery Announcement play**?"

"That would have been after I discovered the body... Ah!", said Tooth as her face clearly expressed shock.

I smiled. Yeah... she's getting it...!

"Wait, it happened after Tooth saw the body?", asked Fish.

"I have trouble counting but even I know that is clearly wrong!", said Ruff, "Tooth was **the fourth one to discover the body**. The Body Discovery Announcement should've played before she saw the body!"

"Then... does that mean the Announcement didn't count someone?", asked Anna.

"Yes." This was it.

"The Announcement skipped one person... the true killer in this case... and that person is... **Aster**. The Body Discovery Announcement should have played back when you saw the body... but it didn't. Want to know why? **Because you had already seen the body, back when you committed the crime!**", I finished as I pointed my finger at the Ultimate Survivalist.

"Guh!". A strained grunt left the silver-haired teen's lips, heavy perspiration hinting at his true state of mind. "No... no, that... you...!"

"It's over, Aster.", I said, a strange surge of confidence rising in my chest. "Once I go over your crime and make everything clear... even you will not be able to deny this!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>Everything falls into place...<em>

\* \* \*

><p><em>"This case actually started way before we found North's body."<em>

\_"The culprit had been to the Final Dead Room and he used the secret behind the Octagon to plan his crime. First, the killer did something simple; lure out a victim. He was targeting someone in particular this time around. The culprit simply asked North to come talk to him in a certain place. That would be the backyard of \_\_\*\*Virtue's Last Reward. \*\*\_\_ North fell for the trap completely, as he was willing to trust anyone in this situation."\_

\_"However, that wasn't everything the killer did."\_

\_"Using the Final Dead Room's spoils, he set his plan in motion. First, the killer took a \_\_\*\*combat knife\*\*\_\_ in order to incapacitate North. The culprit knew going against the Ultimate Sculptor unarmed was suicide, which is why he took further precautions even with the knife in hand. Coating the blade with \_\_\*\*Dimethylheptylpyran, an incapacitating agent, \*\*\_\_he was set to confront the Ultimate Sculptor."\_

\_"But his plan didn't end there."\_

\_"Using the fact that the locks from our doors in the motel couldn't be locked, the culprit probably paid a visit to my room. He had planned on controlling Toothless with the \_\_\*\*Dragonsbane\*\*\_\_ he had gotten from the Final Dead Room, but he didn't count on the fact that I was on Jack's room. This made a setback on his plan, which would come to haunt him later on. Regardless, the killer did manage to find his target in Jack's room much later. I don't know what he planned to do in case me and Jack were awake the moment he stepped in the room, but I kinda don't want to know."\_

\_"In any case, the culprit managed to take Toothless under his command. He needed to do this in order to complete his trap; he didn't actually kill North using the Night Fury. Because of the Mutual Killing rules, the culprit had to do the deed itself in order to be able to leave. But with Toothless' unwilling cooperation, the killer was able to throw us off his trail."\_

\_"Next, the killer waited for North to appear on the appointed place. The culprit traveled there from the hotel's lobby using the Final Dead Room's \_\_\*\*hidden bonus: the trap door.\*\*\_\_ Using this, the killer was able to move freely without leaving any tracks or footprints. When North appeared on the appointed place, the blackened took his chance and cut North on the wrist with the poisoned knife. It didn't take long for the mountain of man to be put out of commission. North, however, didn't go out without a fight; probably using his last moments of strength, the Ultimate Sculptor took a swing at his attacker. The culprit likely didn't expect a counterattack, which ultimately made him lose something incriminating in the scuffle; because of North's attack, a certain something he always carries with him got broken; a \_\_\*\*painted egg. \*\*\_\_The culprit, of course, cleaned up all the eggshells he could find, but he missed a small \_\_\*\*fragment. \*\*\_\_This would later help us pinpoint his identity."\_

\_"The killer, satisfied on his cover-up job, ordered Toothless to

carry North's body using the Final Dead Room's trapdoor. This trapdoor also lead to the true scene of the crime; the Great Hall. Ordering the Night Fury to carry the Ultimate Sculptor's body to the top of the glass walls that surrounded Monobear on his previous cooking lessons, the culprit took out his trump card: \_\_\*\*The Final Dead Room's Ultimate Weapon. \*\*\_\_Contrary to its shady looks, the controller activated a mechanism in the Great Hall, the three-pronged chandelier that rested on top of the plastic walls where North's body rested. Once he was sure North was in the correct position, the killer... pressed the button on the controller, activating the chandelier's free-fall function and... ending North's life as the prongs on the base of the chandelier punctured his chest and smashed him to the floor."\_\_

\_"As soon as he was sure the Ultimate Sculptor was no more, he pressed the button again to return the chandelier to its original position and took the last step in his convoluted plan; he ordered Toothless to... deface North's body in order to hide the true cause of death. With his deed done, he cleaned up the Night Fury in order to hide the fact that Toothless had ever been on the Great Hall from me and Jack and ordered the dragon to return to our room through the tunnels. Due to the Dragonsbane's effects, Toothless didn't remember anything."\_\_

\_"However, the culprit had lost a lot of time on his initial search for the dragon and on his cleaning up act back at the backside of the hotel, and thus, when he arrived at the hotel, he found himself unable to return to his room because people were coming down to the lobby due to the chandelier's fall, which caused everyone staying on the rooms without soundproof walls to wake up and go to the lobby to investigate it. Because of this, the culprit was forced to \_\_\*\*lie and say that he had heard the sound in order to divert attention from himself, even though this was impossible.\*\*\_\_

\_"If we take all of this in consideration, and we add the fact that \_\_\*\*the Body Discovery Announcement\*\*\_\_ didn't play despite him being the third person seeing the body... we can only conclude that there's only one person in this room that could be the culprit..."\_\_

\_"...Isn't that right, Aster E. Bunnymund?"\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>The face that Aster wore as I went over his crime was taut, a defeated expression clear. No one spoke as I finished my explanation. This... silence...<p>

Though I was sure we had unmasked the killer... though I'm sure we've won...

It doesn't feel like a victory at all...!

It's a hollow triumph. One that will be won by spilling even more blood. I couldn't help but to ask the silver-haired boy in front of me... because no matter how much I thought about it... I couldn't understand... I couldn't even possibly begin to understand...

"Why?"

My voice didn't sound like my own, all my previous confidence gone as it was swallowed by this feeling of confusion and despair.

"Why did you do it, Aster?"

"Heh...", an unexpected laugh came from the Ultimate Survivalist.

"Heheheh...", he crossed his arms and closed his eyes, a fake smirk playing on his face, trying to hide away the fear he was feeling now.

"It appears... that I have lost this bet..."

"Bet? What do you mean...?", asked Rapunzel.

"Hey, um...", interrupted Monobear, who had been oddly quiet compared to the past Class Trial. "I know you guys just finished debating and all and you want to rest or whatever, but since you guys reached a conclusion, let's get the Voting Time out of the way, shall we?"

"Now then... what will it be? Will you guys make the right choice? Or will you bastards pick the dreadfully wroooooong one? I can't wait! I caaaaaan't wait! Let's make this a memorable Voting Time!"

A small start up noise indicated that my booth was ready to accept inputs. Slowly, but surely, my finger slid across the touch screen interface and before I knew it, a selection was made.

As expected, the giant slot machine from before rose from the floor, the reels in the mechanism going too fast for the human eye to follow. It didn't take long for the machine to stop on a mugshot of Aster, the celebratory cheers and claps and cheery music completely at odds with our current mood.

As the confetti fell on us, Monobear began talking again, clapping and laughing excitedly as the slot machine continued its cacophony of mock congratulations.

"Yahoo! Two on a row! You guys are on a roll! That's right! The one that killed that cheap bara knock-off and a giant pain in the ass was, without a doubt, Aster E. Bunnymund!", the Headmaster's expression changed to one of annoyance all of a sudden. "Though I don't know how to feel about the fact that you guys used my Body Discovery Announcement to find out who the Blackened was... Grrr..."

...

I ignored the bear's ramblings. I... I wasn't in the mood. I didn't want to hear him at all! No... what I want to hear is why... why did Aster do this?!

I... I thought he was cool! He was always looking after us, and he acted like a big brother to me and Jack... so why?! Why did he... kill North?! And why is he still trying to act cool, even though his crime has been exposed and even though we... we just sent him to his death...!

"Aster!", came Tooth's sudden, angry voice. "So it was you?! You killed North?!", I had never seen Tooth so angry before, but it was understandable. I, too, wanted to make sense of this.

"You even went as far as to blame everything on Toothless...", said Jack as he gave the Ultimate Survivalist a demolishing glare, his blue, icy eyes dulled with anger and hurt. "You... almost killed us all and put us through a lot... and I-I want to know why! You better have a good enough reason for all the crap you pulled!"

The silver-haired teen listened with a focused expression to the outbursts of the other two, before calmly speaking up.

"Isn't it obvious? I did it to **\*\*survive\*\***."

...What?

The Ultimate Survivalist continued speaking as if what he was saying was the most obvious and sensible thing in the world.

"I did it... to escape Monobear's trap. To get out of that hellhole of hunger and sure death. That's all. That was my motivation."

"Y-you have to be kidding me...", was all I said in response. I couldn't... understand what he was saying at all!

"I assure you, ankle-biter, I am bein' serious-"

"Don't call me that!", I shouted as I shut my eyes, trying to forget the memories of him ruffling my hair. "That... you killed North... and you pinned the blame on Toothless... just so you and only you could live?! \_How selfish can you get?!\_ D-did you even \_care\_ about us?!"

Aster's face flashed with hurt before it gave away to one showing anger. "Oi, you callin' me selfish... ain't that a precious piece of hypocrisy. It's because of your... attitude towards life that I had to do this... there was no other way!"

"Don't give me that!", shouted Merida, positively boiling with anger as she glared at the Ultimate Survivalist. "North... he was doin' his darn best in order to get us out of there without killin' anyone! And we would have found it if ya hadn't been so stupidly selfish ! We would have all survived this, ya prick!"

Aster flinched, but regained his composure, slowly shaking his head. "No... we wouldn't. Because... because of your collective attitudes.", he suddenly pointed at me. "There was no way you guys would survive once you began thinkin' like 'im."

"What... do you mean?", asked Anna.

Aster's face as he retold a scene was one brimming with disapproval:

\* \* \*

><p><em>"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, THEN?!", shouts Snotlout as he closes his eyes tight and clenches his fists. "DO YOU WANT ME TO DIE HERE?! TO JUST... SIT HERE AND STARVE?!"<em>

\_I understand how he feels. I understand how scary and utterly



hopeless our situation looks. But even so, I...\_

\_ "I'd... rather have that happen to us." \_

\_ Everyone looks at me with wide eyes as they hear my mumbling. Feeling more resolute than ever, I face the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's shocked face with a firm expression.\_

\_ "I'd rather... die here trusting everyone, than survive by distrusting any of you." \_

\* \* \*

><p>"...With that sort of defeatist attitude... without that obvious desire to survive... to fight against death...", Aster said as his face started to show a frustrated expression. "There was... no way I was going to bet on North's proposal. There was no way I would accept your flaky way of doin' things!<p>

"Because life is all about survivin'! Sacrificin' others to move on. To stop fightin'... to just give up because of dumb sentimentalism... that is a very affront to life itself!", shouted Aster looking more passionate than I had ever seen him.

"And I just... couldn't let that slide. I wasn't going to let us all die... There was no way I...", the Ultimate Survivalist's face grew sullen. "There was no way I was goin' to let all your lives to go down the drain because of somethin' like this... That's why I did this."

"Are you trying to justify your crime like this...", said Tooth, shaking with anger. "You think we're going to believe that you did all of this to save us?! You still tried to deceive us! You tried to hide your crime! If... if you really wanted to save us, you would've come clean!"

Aster chuckled at the Ultimate Dentists' words. "Come clean? You misunderstand.", he said, "I simply made a bet with myself."

"What are you even talking about?", said Flynn, looking extremely perturbed.

"Don't ya get it? I'm the Ultimate Survivalist for a reason.", continued Aster, "I wasn't just goin' to give up my life; I fully intended to escape both from this place and Monobear's trap. I... knew the risks. I knew that in the end, it was goin' to be either you or me. That... was the bet I made with myself; a bet in which your lives and mine were at stake."

"A bet... I lost."

Aster's smile was a wistful one as he looked at all of us. I looked away once his gaze reached me, distinctly feeling it linger on me.

I didn't know what to make of Aster's words. I didn't know... whether what he was saying was how he really felt... or if he was being intentionally aloof to make us hate him.

I didn't know. And I doubt I'll ever do.

"I will not ask for forgiveness.", he said, his voice sounding oddly at peace. " I did end up deceivin' you all. That is a fact that cannot be disputed. But let this be a lesson to you all; No matter what happens, no matter what despair comes to you, never give up on life."

"Now, come, step all over my life and move on. Use me and live on. Let me... become your hope."

Unknowingly, I had started crying. I didn't understand why. He... Aster... was a killer! He betrayed us! He fully intended to sacrifice us and escape! He deserved this!

And yet...

Aster was also a friend. That's why... despite all he did... maybe that's why... I was crying like this.

"Ugh... e-even in the end, you're a pain in the ass... saying stuff I don't understand...", said Jack as he ran his sleeve over his nose, trying to hide his tears from all of us.

The mood in the courtroom was charged, billowing with anger and sadness. A maelstrom of our feelings was making this place uncomfortable.

Naturally, the Headmaster jumped on this opportunity.

"Ugh! As expected of the \*\*Ultimate Hope\*\*, you just had to go and give this totally cool speech in order to make this less-despair inducing...", said the Headmaster with a disgruntled expression. "We'll see how much you can keep your facade once I give you your deserved \*\*punishment!\*\*"

Aster chuckled. "I've lived my life always on the verge of death; I am not scared of whatever punishment you have for me."

"Ooooh! so coool!", swooned Monobear, faking a blush and a fainting motion. "Whatevs, guys like you always despair in the end! I'm not gonna let this ruin my fun! After all... this is the first time \*\*I get to do two executions in one Class Trial\*\*!"

...

...

"What?", I said out loud, not understanding.

"What the hell are you blabberin' about...?", asked Aster, also confused.

"Yeah, I don't get it.", said Tuffnut. "Why the hell is he getting executed twice?"

Monobear's red eye flared up, an ugly laugh escaping his plush-like snout. "Puhuhuhu... don't be silly! I'm going to execute two different people! After all... \*\*there were two criminals in this Class Trial! \*\*Or did you forget?"

A titanic sense of dread fell on my stomach, feeling like a ball of

lead.

"What are you even saying?!", shouted Fishlegs. "There was only one Blackened, and that was Aster!"

"Nuh-uh!", said Monobear as he wagged his finger. "You're forgetting! True, there was only one Blackened in this case, but that doesn't mean I'll only punish him! After all... There's no way I'm \*\*going to let the accomplice of the hook\*\*!"

No...

No...!

"W-wait, accomplice?!", asked Anna.

"You don't mean... \*\*Toothless?!\*\*", exclaimed Rapunzel, bringing her hands to her mouth.

The Night Fury instantly tensed as he caught on what was going on.

"Yes indeed!", shouted Monobear jovially. "Oh man... I've been looking so forward to this! It was driving me nuts, you know? Having this lizard around was turning out to be a serious thorn on my side, so I was just waiting for an excuse to make him into boots! Who would've thunk someone would do me that favor?! Puhuhuhuhu!"

"H-hold on...!", I said, my voice cracking with anxiety. "No...! Toothless... wasn't a willing accomplice...!"

"So what?", said Monobear in a flat voice. "Eating unwillingly is still eating. Breathing unwillingly is still breathing. Unwilling murder is still murdering. And... unwillingly assisting in a crime is still assisting. Just because you didn't want to do the things that you did... that doesn't absolve you of anything! One must take responsibility of their actions!"

The moment I saw the red button rise in front of Monobear, my panic reached critical levels.

"Hold on there, buster!", shouted Aster, his previous cool exterior gone. "Th-this... this isn't what I...!"

"Hee hee, I have to thank you, Aster.", giggled the Headmaster as he twirled his hammer in his paw. "Thanks to your selfish actions, I get to off this mascot character that was stealing my spotlight!"

Before I knew what I was doing, I had left my booth and I started to run towards Toothless', whose expression was one of utter fear.

I could see on the corner of my eye the hammer rising.

"Now then, I've prepared beary special punishments for Aster E. Bunnymund, the selfish brat who didn't think thoroughly, and Toothless, that freeloaded lizard that wasn't even a student!"

I saw the hammer hit the button.

"Let's give it everything we got! Iiiiiit's punishment time!"

I was almost there...!

And just like that. Right in front of my eyes... Toothless' scared, green eyes... were gone, forcibly taken away by the same chain and claw that had taken Astrid.

My arms... closed around the empty space where once my bud had been. And all I could do was see how my friend... was carried away from me through the roof, not being able to escape no matter how much he struggled.

"... I'm sorry, ankle-biter..."

Aster's voice... That was the last I heard too from him, as he was also taken away to the same place Toothless had vanished to.

...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>GAME OVER<strong>

\*\*ASTER HAS BEEN FOUND GUILTY. COMMENCING PUNISHMENT\*\*.

\* \* \*

><p>Just like in the previous case, a large monitor descended from the roof, and once it lit up, we were forced to watch everything. All of it. The entire execution.<p>

\*\*Punishment: An Egg-citing Battering to Remember!\*\*

A large, forest-like area can be seen, the tree's so tall and thick they obscure all sunlight, giving it a dark and gloomy atmosphere. In one of the clearings, Aster can be seen, looking around carefully, his senses on high alert. A noise behind him makes the Survivalist jump back from where he was standing and just a second later, a Monobear pounces where he was, moving impossibly fast and with claws outstretched.

Aster has barely any time to breath when another noise forces him to move, evading successfully another attack from another Monobear.

The action repeats itself continuously, with the Ultimate Survivalist gracefully evading all attacks, jumping away from the deadly claws of the apparently-infinite number of Monobears which keep appearing and attacking with speed and intent to kill.

Still, the mechanical bears can't seem to touch the silver-haired teen as he dances his way through steel and death, a confident smirk appearing on his face as he seems to be fully in his medium; as if he were already used to this. For a second there, it seems like he'll be able to escape unscathed.

And then, as he jumped back away from a Monobear that came too close for comfort, he stepped on a nearby bush. In an instant, a metallic noise resounds, and a rabbit snare that was lying concealed in the bush springs to life, wrapping itself around Aster's ankle. Before he can even react, the Ultimate Survivalist is dragged away from all the

Monobears, desperately clawing at the ground as he is mercilessly pulled into the depths of the forest.

The camera cuts briefly and the scene changes. We're still seeing the forest but now the setting is different. In the middle of the clearing, Aster can be seen, his face showing actual anxiousness as he finds himself tied to a pole. At his feet is a lit fire, burning his boots slowly but surely painfully. Around him is a circle of Monobears armed with baskets full of eggs and other things like rocks, and around those is another circle of Monobear playing drums ominously and chanting while others dance around with precise movements.

It all happens in an instant.

At the same time, the Monobears start to pelt Aster with the eggs with such a force the pole he's tied to visibly creaks, the wince on the Ultimate Survivalist telling. Slowly, the pace picks up, with more and more eggs being thrown at the same time until a veritable deluge of punishment rains on the Ultimate Survivalist. Soon enough, the eggs are replaced by stones. The sickening sound of rocks hitting Aster are barely concealed by the music being played by the Monobears, which also grew in intensity, and kept increasing in volume until...

Until Aster, who had been uselessly squirming in order to escape, ceased moving. The last thing we saw was a scene of the camera zooming out from the clearing, the image of a body covered in egg yolk and blood clear in our mind.

\* \* \*

><p>I... I was sick beyond belief. I still could see Aster's terror-stricken face as he realized what was going to happen to him. Even as I closed my eyes and covered my ears, I could still hear every impact, every crunch, every thud.<p>

But that wasn't the end.

The monitor once again came to life, and though I knew what was going to happen, I found myself unable to look away as the dreaded words appeared on screen.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>GAME OVER<strong>

\*\*TOOTHLESS HAS BEEN FOUND GUILTY. COMMENCING PUNISHMENT\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Punishment: Toothless' Test Dive<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>The scene that was being showed to us was an imposing cliff by the sea. Impossibly tall and daunting, the sound of powerful crashing waves could be heard. And on the edge of that cliff, was my bud. But there was something different about him.<p>

Around his torso, a large chain was clasped, and at the end of it was a very big and heavy looking iron ball, almost as big as Toothless himself and on his snout, one very big leather belt forcing his mouth shut could be seen. The dragon was looking around, furiously striking the metallic object, but not leaving any dents or scratches on it. Uselessly, the Night Fury tried to fly away, only to pathetically flop back to the ground, both because of the chain and his damaged tail fin. After trying two more times without success, Toothless made to walk away from the edge of the cliff, obviously struggling to drag the iron ball with him.

But he didn't go far.

From the sky, a rather large contraption fell, blocking the way away from Toothless. It was a sturdy looking machine, sporting a variety of weapons, including saws, flamethrowers, and mechanical moving swords. The machine was adorned with a cheap-looking dragon cutout and riding on top of it was a gleeful looking Monobear.

The machine started to move forward slowly, but threatening to hurt Toothless with its weaponry and every step.

The Night Fury had no choice but to retreat. He couldn't jump over the tall, foreboding machine. He couldn't blast it to pieces with his plasma breath. He couldn't get too close because of the weaponry. He couldn't do anything but walk away from the machine...

...and closer to the edge of the cliff.

It was slow and painful to watch. I couldn't bear to see Toothless trying to look for a way out as the accursed bear and his contraption slowly advanced on him, each passing moment giving Toothless less moving space.

...

It was inevitable. It only took a few seconds for Toothless to run out of standing ground as he walked closer and closer to the edge. The last thing I saw of my bud was... was his terrified-looking face as the iron ball he was dragging fell off the edge, dragging him and sending him into a free fall, directly into the savage and rough waves, never to be seen again... disappearing under the dark waters.

\* \* \*

><p>Just like that... they were gone.<p>

Two lives... extinguished right in front of, one after another. Forcing us to watch this without being able to do anything about it...

He's gone...

My bud... my best friend... I-I'll never... I-I'll never be able to hug him anymore. He'll... no longer wake me up in the mornings! Never again I'll be bathed in his spit whenever he got affectionate...!

I'll... I'll never able to tell him how much he helped me through all

of this...!

He's... gone.

And as he left, he took away all sense of warmth from my heart, leaving it empty and hollow... only an immense feeling of despair and hurt remaining. I feel like my chest about the burst as it rocks viciously of the unrestrained sobs that escape me.

And above all else...

A laugh. A painful laugh in my ears, ringing around the courtroom, the laugh of Monobear fills every nook and cranny as he hoots and hollers like a madman.

>"Wahooo! Extremeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Man, what a rush! I feel like I died twice! I should definitely do more executions in this way! I've never felt more alive, hee hee!"<p>

"Shut the fuck up!", shouted Snotlout, looking angry. "Stop messing with us already! Let us go! We didn't do anything to you! Just leave us alone!"

"Oh? But I can't do that!", said Monobear, looking undaunted. "I'm still not through with you bastards. I will not stop until I have thoroughly infected you all with irreversible despair! Until I prove to **\*\*everyone\*\*** that hope is infinitely inferior to despair, I will not stop! So..."

A whimsical spin.

"I'll see you guys later! Please do look forward to the next death... Puhuhu... Puhuhuhuhu... Aaaaaahahahahahahahahahaaaaa!"

And with a maniacal laugh that could only be provided with someone who didn't feel remorse at spreading misfortune, a laugh that only found joy in our pain, the Headmaster vanished from the Courtroom, leaving us all struck with a sense of impotence. We were still like puppets under his rule, unable to change our future.

The sound of approaching footsteps and a sudden hug caught me by surprise. I could hear restrained sobs in the voice that tried to soothe me. "I... I am so sorry, Hiccup..."

Tooth.

"Please... P-please forgive me... for being such an insensitive idiot. I... I shouldn't have said what I did to Toothless... I'm so sorry... I'm sorry..."

The way she said that, the heartfelt feeling behind her worries, the sincerity on her tears... made me choke up hard.

"It... It's alright", I reassured. I don't know how I could say that. Because I knew I wasn't alright. I felt half-dead. Drained emotionally. I just wanted to sleep and never awake. A word without Toothless felt meaningless to me.

And yet... I could say that.

"I-I... I forgive you, i-it will be alright."

I could say that... because this wasn't Tooth's fault. In the end, it wasn't Aster's fault either. The one at fault here was the cause of all this anguish. The one that forced us to go through this for his twisted plans.

Our true enemy was Monobear.

And knowing this, seeing the people I cared the most slipping away from my fingers...

Through all of my pain, an ever bigger sense of anger burned in my chest. I... I didn't want to lose anyone anymore. I didn't ever want to feel like this again...

So... like, Aster said... I'll fight. I'll keep on living... living on with this pain, this emptiness. I'll do so and... defeat the Headmaster... and get out of here with everyone. Alive.

\* \* \*

><p>It was with that feeling in my heart that we left the courtroom, the whole ride back to the camp grounds as quiet as when we arrived, that feeling of loss heavy above us and in our hearts.<p>

I was close to breaking down when my cottage came into view. Because I... was going to sleep alone tonight.

A firm grip on my hand makes me turn around.

I see Jack's concerned face focused on mine as he grabs my hand, his expression fully saying that he won't let go. That he'll stick around. Without a word, the whitette pulls me away from my cottage and directly towards his, and I comply. I don't know what he's planning until I see him open the door and he tries to pull me inside.

I resist, which makes him look a bit hurt.

"W-wait, Jack... what are you doing?', I say, suddenly painful aware that my attraction for this boy is still alive and well, in fact being bolstered by my previous resolution of not wanting to lose anyone.

"I-I..." begins the whitette, "W-well, I just thought you looked so... lonely and sad... and I thought...", he stutters out with a blush creeping on his pale cheeks. "I thought y-you would rather not sleep alone tonight... so you can stay the night here, if you'd like. With me."

Oh.

I'm also suddenly very conscious of the fact that my cheeks are heating up.

And yet, I'm tempted by his proposal... I-I would really like to... wait, no, Haddock! Be sensible.

"B-but Jack... err, the School Trip Rules... say we..."



"\*\*We can only sleep in the cottages.\*\* Yeah...", he says as he rubs his white locks, "But it doesn't say we have to sleep in \*\*our assigned \*\*cottages.", he finishes with a slight smirk.

Oh.

He has a point.

"I-I mean... you don't have to if you don't want to...! It's just... you know... a suggestion!", says the Ultimate Mystery as he flusteredly rubs the back of his head, his blush intensifying. "I just thought... it would be nice! I'd... I'd rather like it too if you... I MEAN... Forget it, Hic!"

"I... don't mind."

Before I know what I am saying, I speak.

But its the truth. That's how I really feel.

The dumbfounded expression Jack's face is priceless as I speak. "I... well, if you're OK with it... then I'm OK with it too. I'd, uh... love to stay the night. Yeah."

The whitette's face breaks into a full smile, a sincere one full of disbelief as he wipes away a strand of hair from his forehead. "O-of course I'm OK with it Hic! Please... come on in!"

The way Jack prances around, looking excited as he sees me walk in kind off eases off my mind from all the stress we went through today.

However, my nerves are on high alert by the time we both get into Jack's bed. We're both a few inches apart from each other.

Being in the same bed as your crush... is not good for your health, I've decided. Sure, I don't feel lonely anymore but my heart is beating far too fast for my own good. It doesn't help it that Jack is wearing a ridiculously adorable pajama, blue in color and with white sheep plastered all over it. Jack seems incredibly antsy as well, not really making eye contact.

A few minutes in this atmosphere pass before the whitette speaks up.

"So... uh, Hic... you feel any better?"

This question... is hard to answer. I feel somewhat... resolute. I'm tired. Tired of living in fear, tired of losing people. Tired of all this confusion around us. And I'm determined to not let any of this happen again.

And yet...

Jack actually turns his head to look at me, his stare full of worry. I gulp before answering, turning my whole body to face him.

"I... I do feel a little better. But... I guess, I still am afraid? Yeah...", I nod to myself. "Yeah... I'm afraid of... of losing anyone anymore. I don't want to be alone anymore... I hate this feeling of

loss..."

Jack seems to rummage this answer as he hums to himself, closing his eyes in the process. And then before I know what is happening, the whitette opens his eyes with a determined look and grabs me in a clumsy embrace.

"W-wha-? Jack?! W-what are you...?!", I squirm at the sudden contact, not fully expecting this to happen.

"D-don't move around, nerd. You're making this harder than it should be.", says Jack as he mumbles his cryptic answer, burying his face on my hair.

"W-why are you hugging me?!", I stutter, fully aware of the feelings this kind of contact is stirring in my mind.

"You'll never be alone, Hic."

Jack's answer is so sudden, and so confident, I completely stop moving.

"I... This is my way of showing you that.", he continues, sounding embarrassed, "I-if you ever feel alone, like you have no one with you, I-I'll... I'll always be right next to you. Close to you... so, don't worry... I'll never let you go... is what I wanted to say."

...

A tear slides down my cheek. I can hear it Jack's voice; he truly means that. And I... I appreciate it. From the bottom of my heart.

Much to the whitette's surprise, I return the hug. He stiffens at my sudden action, but instantly relaxes when I say this:

"Thank you, Jack. Thank you so much."

I...I don't care what the article says anymore. I'm conscious of the heat between our bodies, of the beating of his heart. Of his arms hugging me tightly, of his steady breathing. I don't care if the article says that "Jack died" because... the "Jack" right here... is very much alive. And the one I've come to know and love.

What awaited us in the future was uncertain. I still... couldn't get over the fact that Toothless was gone. He... who never abandoned me. He, who was always at my side... and now, I was lying next to someone who claimed that he would do the same.

Daring to believe in his promise, I hugged Jack even tighter. I would do anything in my power to also not lose him.

And thus, feeling a lot more calmer and happier, but still hurting from the loss, I let my tears fall down as I laid there next to Jack, letting sleep claim me.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>null POV<strong>

Monobear couldn't help but to groan in disgust as he saw the scene playing out in Jack's room. He was watching the two boys sleep from his room, eyes trained in monitor, whose light gave the room that same eerie look.

"Seriously, it's a like a cheap high school romance drama!", complained Monobear as he made the chair he was sitting on spin. "I still can't believe they found a loophole in my school rules! Unbearlievable!"

That person was, once again, in the same room as Monobear. Curiously, that person asked what the Headmaster was going to do.

"Hmm, nah... I'll do nothing!", said the Headmaster as he tore his eyes away from the scene in the monitor. "Honestly, it's not im-por-tant at all! I'd love to mess with them but I'll just let that slide... after all, the more close they get... Puhuhuhuhu... the more despair I'll get from them when they're inevitably torn apart!"

That person calmly watched the bear giggle over something he quite couldn't understand. Suddenly, the Headmaster stopped laughing, and instead faced that person with a serious expression.

"Changing topics... you... my little traitor... have you found what I ordered you to find?"

That person, regretfully, informed Monobear that Sandy's Notebook hadn't been found yet. At hearing this, the bear huffed angrily, spinning his chair to face the monitors once more.

"Hmhmhmhm... this is troubling! If that notebook reaches their hands before I destroy it... it could hamper my plans. You better redouble triple fourthify your efforts, OK?!", demanded the Headmaster in a tone of voice that person only could describe as slightly panicky.

That person earnestly promised to find the notebook before the others did. Hearing that the Headmaster hummed, apparently satisfied with that person's answer.

"Good! This time around, even though I used two of my best motives, that stupid Asty had to go and give hope to these guys by making that lame speech. I wasted two perfectly good motives! If he hadn't decided to be all cool, these guys would've been drowning in despair!"

Monobear pointed at the monitor that showed the two boy sleeping, a content smile in their faces.

"Well, not all plans are perfect... even I make mistakes sometimes. But not anymooooore...", with a sing song voice, the Headmaster turned his chair in order to see another monitor. That person recognized the scene being displayed in the screen; it was the Meeting Spot, still housing that weird clock-like mechanism, the LED Display still counting down ominously. 17 days remained.

"Yeah... I'm still on schedule." commented Monobear nonchalantly. "I'll just have to up the ante! Come out full guns blazing! I'm sure my next motive will totally floor them! Puhuhuhuhu..."

Should that person still spy them, he asked to the Headmaster.

"Huh? Of course you should! I need you there so you can keep giving me your reports! It is indispensable that you tell me how much their despair has progressed!", declared the Headmaster. "So go back and keep watching! That's all you're good for anyway!"

That person bowed and left the room, leaving Monobear to his machinations alone.

The Headmaster once again turned to watch the clock-like mechanism in the Meeting Spot, his red eye glinting maliciously in the darkness of the room.

"Soon... Soon the Despair Restoration Program will be complete... Upupupupuhuhuhu!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>DAYS LEFT: 17 DAYS<strong>

\*\*STUDENTS STILL ALIVE: 12\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>CHAPTER 2: LIVING TO THE FULLEST - END<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And with that... the second arc is gone and the curtain falls, ready to rise on the next arc. More questions were brought up and hardly any answers came but don't worry, we'll get them eventually.<strong>

\*\*So, what did you think? What do you think of the "going over the crime" part I added? Do you think it helps making the case clearer, or do you think its just a big hindrance?\*\*

\*\*Please, any comments, suggestions, criticizing... and praise, if you have some... please tell me that in your reviews!\*\*

\*\*Anywho... next arc will be the middlegame! The ante will rise, the mysteries will probably become even more mysterious and perhaps... perhaps we will have some actual answers? and maybe actual honest to god hijack? Who KNOWS.\*\*

\*\*Lastly, keep your eyes peeled out for a special surprise sometime soon... \*\*

\*\*Hopefully I'll be able to kickstart the next arc. But for now... Monodoof is out, peace!\*\*

## 26. 3 - Chapter 3 - Daily Lives A

\*\*So, let's start the next arc, shall we? \*\*

\*\*A foreword, you say? Fineeee, I guess we can have one. Nothing much to say though. The only thing I'll say is... that this is a very long

and exposition-heavy chapter. Also! This chapter contains heavy Danganronpa 1 AND Danganronpa Zero/Danganronpa 2 spoilers. Be warned! With that said... enjoy!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

The vast, open, blue sky spreads before my very eyes, dotted with enormous and fluffy white clouds, extending far beyond where I can see. A familiar feeling of freedom surges through my body as a current of wind caresses my face. Sudden movement below me catches my attention, and I find myself riding on my bud Toothless, who is looking at me with that gummy smile of his. I return the gesture happily with one of my own. Looking below me I can see the wide ocean raging below us.

But I am not afraid.

That's right... this kind of routine, our normal, everyday morning flights... me and my bud are used to this kind of activity.

"So, what do you say bud?", I ask the Night Fury. "Should we do the usual loops and free falls?". Toothless answers with a growl and a nod and before I know it, we are diving directly towards the raging blue below us at an alarming speed. Even so, I couldn't help but to yell with excitement as I grabbed ahold of the Night Fury's saddle, enjoying every second of the descent before we rose into the air with a sharp turn, a shout of victory escaping my lips as we rose higher and higher into the air, Toothless spinning occasionally as we left the waters and even some clouds below.

This feeling of exhilaration and freedom... with nothing holding me back, no village, no expectations, no duties... I loved it. Out here in the open sky with my bud, I felt really like myself, not putting a facade for anyone. If I could, I would make this moment last forever.

All of a sudden, the vivid, blue sky around me darkens, storm clouds instantly replacing the peaceful ones. Before I know it, I suddenly find myself alone in the air, with Toothless nowhere in sight. I start to panic; I can't find my bud at all no matter where I look.

And soon after, I start to fall.

I can't do anything but flail around uselessly as I plunge towards the earth, gradually gaining speed as I break through the clouds and I get closer and closer to the sea's surface. No matter much I scream or try to slow my fall, the waters below me get nearer and nearer. I close my eyes, ready to accept my fate, but still scared and confused. I plunge into the dark waters and I'm completely submerged in them, sinking deeper and deeper, the darkness around me threatening to engulf me.

I awake with a scream.

Tears are falling from my eyes nonstop along with my terrified screams. I can't stop shaking as I cry and scream myself hoarse, trying to escape from the darkness around me, to try to chase it

away. It takes me some time to realize the shaking isn't coming all from me and to really hear what is going around me.

"Hic... Hiccup! Hey!"

I blink through my tears and I spot a familiar head full of white hair. Little by little, I start to recognize the facial structure of a very worried-looking Jack, who is holding me firmly. Ah... yeah, I... I was in sleeping in Jack's room. Yeah, I remember now... I decided to spend the night with him because I didn't want to be alone-

Suddenly, my chest feels like its being stabbed.

That's right.

I was going to spend the night alone had Jack not offered his company... because...

...Because Toothless was... dead...

N-No... I promised I wouldn't cry... I promised myself I'd be strong. "I promised...!", without meaning to, I blurted out those words. I closed my eyes, tears falling from them both because of the pain of loss and embarrassment. I was making a fool of myself in front of Jack! Stupid, weak, Haddock. You can't even be strong when it matters the most...! I wasn't the only one who lost someone important and yet...!

Jack's hug comes surprisingly tender and gentle, and I hate myself for letting it get to me like this. I feel so stupid, so weak, wanting this... "I-I'm sorry... J-Jack... I...", I manage to say through sobs.

"Hic... it's alright.", he says in a soothing voice, hesitating a bit before patting my head. "Y-you... you don't have to pretend you're strong... I won't judge you, you know that. And I don't mind if you cry... I-I understand... so if you want to, I won't think badly of you..."

Why?

Why can't I stop crying?! Why can't I, for once, be strong?! It's not fair...! There's nothing special about me, everything is so messed up, and I can't even throw away my weakness! It isn't fair! This... and the fact that Toothless is gone...! It's incredibly unfair! I...

"I miss him so much... I miss him, Jack.", I say, as another sob threatens to escape me. Jack just keeps running his hand through my hair, listening silently to me. "I... I miss Toothless so much it hurts..."

That's... why I can't stop crying. I was just fooling myself back there in the Class Trial. I was trying to shut my heart off from my true feelings. Of course Toothless' death had destroyed me. I was just... trying to act like it hadn't. I had hardened my heart, but now a crack had appeared on it and now there was no going back.

So instead of trying to hold it back in, I just let it all out. All

the grieving I should have done... I did so in this morning, in the arms of this whitette, who didn't complain nor let go of me as I cried my heart out to him.

I didn't know when I finally stopped crying, but after doing so, I fell asleep once more, tired from all that emotional discharge.

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...

It wouldn't be until much later in the morning that I would wake up again, still wrapped in Jack's arms. Apparently I had slept through Monobear's morning announcement. My stirring made Jack look down, a tired smile on his face; I wondered if he even got some sleep after my outburst and I couldn't help but feel bad.

"Morning, sleepy beauty."

Without meaning too, I rolled my eyes at his greeting, and before I could even stop myself, I answered him. "Really...? Are you reusing content?"

...Stupid! He's being so nice to you and you go and make a sarcastic comment! Please give me the Jerk Award! Or rather nominate me for Dick of the Century!

The whitette's honest laugh snaps me from my self-deprecating tirade.

"I take it you're feeling better, then?"

At that, my chest constricts, the painful memories returning. Jack looks like he regrets what he says because he's instantly apologizing but I reassure him that it's alright. "I-I'll be OK, don't worry Jack... I-I swear..."

And although I'm far too comfortable in this position than I ought to, I manage to disentangle myself from Jack's hold. The Ultimate Mystery reluctantly lets me go but he seems to understand; I just need some time to... fully absorb this. Without making any comment, Jack walks up and takes out a change of clothes from a small chest he brought from the supermarket and goes to the bathroom to change.

I sit up from Jack's bed. The bed that we were sharing.

...Oh gods I was sharing a bed with Jack what is wrong with me?! Oh Thor... Oh Thor...!

I seriously need to get a grip! It was nothing big or it didn't mean anything more! Jack was just doing what a friend does in these situations... I guess? I mean, our situation is pretty unique but I think this is a rather normal course of action to take between friends, right?!

...Why am I even hesitating?! I said... I decided back then in the resort that I would... I would do it! And right now it's the perfect time! Monobear isn't around, we're alone... I definitely need to

seize this chance!

"You know, Hic... Fish actually messaged us all this morning not long ago before you awoke..."

I was too invested in my train of thought that Jack's return went unnoticed by me. Of course, the only way I could react was by yelping like... uh... something unmanly. The whitette merely looked at me from the doorway of the bathroom with an arched eyebrow, before breaking into a slight chuckle.

The heat in my cheeks was both because of how great Jack looked in that light blue tank-top and dark green shorts, and because of my embarrassment. Trying to steer away from that dangerous train of thought, I spoke. "O-oh? Really? What did he say?"

Jack shrugged a few seconds after staring at me blankly. "I dunno. He just said it was very important and that we should all meet at the restaurant right away."

That caught my interest. What did Fishlegs find? Scooting off from bed, I put on my shoes before nodding to Jack. "Well, we can't leave them hanging... shall we go?"

Jack nodded back. Using Jack's bathroom to at least try to cover up the fact that I've been crying, I washed my face thoroughly and set off with the smiling whitette towards the restaurant. I couldn't help but to look towards my cottage's roof; as I expected, no black dragon was waiting there. Still, that didn't make it any less painful. The fact that he was gone was... something I wasn't used to yet.

It was a beautiful morning in the camp yet again, completely at odds with the horrors that had occurred yesterday. As usual, time marched on, not stopping despite the horrible things we had gone through. Completely ignoring the pain I was experiencing right now. And that scared me. Time will not stop for anyone... and neither will our captor, who is no doubt planning something more to torture us once again.

And yet, even if Monobear is plotting something... I will not falter. I've already decided... I'm through with losing people. I'm through with being pushed around. This time... we'll counterattack. Some way. Somehow. That... is the hope I have earned.

Hoping that Fishlegs' summoning will have something to do with a plan to fight back, I pick up the pace, forcing Jack to speed up in order to keep up with me as we walk down the familiar camp grounds, where everyone is waiting.

**\*\*Chapter 3: Despair-Syndrome - Daily Lives A\*\***

The scene unfolding before me as Jack and I arrive into the restaurant is... not what I was expecting, to be honest.

"H-hey, Snotlout, please, don't use my notes as material for your paperplan-...! Tuffnut, Ruffnut! Put that fire out! That's important research mater-! Flynn, anything but spitballs, please!"

Fishlegs was running around the table we used for our breakfast meetings, trying to put a stop to the antics of the less serious



students. In the middle of the table was a pile of old books and what appeared to be research notes. What caught my attention, however, was the fact that most of them had the Hope's Peak logo on them. Had Fishlegs found something else?

"We'll settle down once you tell us why you gathered us here, Fish!", shouted Snotlout as he slammed a sheet of paper he was holding on the table.

The Ultimate Encyclopedia snatched the sheet away and gently put it down with the ones in the middle before he jabbed a chubby finger with a reprimanding expression at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter. "Not yet! Not until everyone gets here! This is important, guys!"

Tooth, who had been standing next to Fishlegs as she oversaw the chaos, saw us standing by the door and smiled at us, beckoning us to sit down. It was a tired smile, and I could definitely see bags under her eyes; she was taking the loss hard too, but even so I could tell she was trying her best to move on.

I exchanged a glance with Jack and we proceeded to take a seat next to Merida and Rapunzel, who had saved us a seat. Not like there was a shortage of seats or anything... and that only reminded me that we had lost four of our friends already. The Ultimate Archer and Ultimate Painter gave us their best cheery smiles and well, I couldn't help but to smile back.

"About time you showed up, Haddock!", complained Snotlout as he crossed his arms with clear annoyance in his face.

"Yeah! Where were you guys?", asked Flynn as he put down his straw, a spitball on it still lodged in the thing.

Remembering where I was... yeah, hoping that my blush wouldn't betray me, I answered the Ultimate Thief. "O-oh... um... about that, yeah... I just had... trouble! Sleeping, you know...?"

"Of course we know!", said Anna with annoyance tainting her words as she glared at the Ultimate Thief. "I mean, really, after all you went through, we don't blame you for being a little late! Duh, think before you speak, Flynn!"

The Ultimate Thief's face goes from confusion to understanding before looking at me with an apologetic expression. Before he could apologize, I reassured him I was fine. I... was trying to put that behind me, after all. Instead of dwelling on this, I turned to face the Ultimate Encyclopedia, who looked eager to start. "So, uh, what's this about Fishlegs?"

"Yeah, you only told us it was important but you never told us why." said Merida as she eyed the pile of papers in the middle of the table.

"If this is a waste of time, I'll leave a little surprise under your bed later!", threatened Ruff with a playful smile. Fishlegs yelped a little and backed off, but Tooth put a hand on the chubby boy's shoulder and encouraged him to speak. With some difficulty, the blonde teen took a deep breath to calm himself down and after a few seconds of silence, he spoke.

"OK, how many of you are acquainted with the '\*\*Neo World Order Theory'\*\*?"

A natural sense of confusion rose from all of us. I had read a lot of books back at Berk and I was in the know about a lot of the theories that thrived in the scientific community, but this was the first time I had heard of it.

Or... was it? Somehow, I felt like I had heard the term not long ago... or rather... I had read it somewhere.

A hand shot up in the silent room. It was Rapunzel, who looked extremely giddy as she shook her hand in the air to catch Fishlegs' attention. The Ultimate Encyclopedia gave her a right to speak with a smile, and the blonde girl stood up in order to speak. "I have! I read about it in a book not long ago!" Rapunzel pursed her lips as she tried to remember what she had read.

"If I remember correctly... the theory basically states that our world and our current history... isn't the only one that has existed. Before our era, there existed a civilization as advanced or even more advanced than us, before a cataclysm brought it to an end... and that our current world has only existed for about 300 years, and that we managed to rebuild our society using the remains of our past ancestors."

...Now that was hard to believe!

"There were people before us 300 years ago...?", began Flynn.

"But that's bullshit! Everyone knows humankind is only 300 years old!", exclaimed Snotlout.

"And what makes you so sure?", asked Peter, eyeing the Ultimate Heavy Lifter with curiosity.

"Cuz... because... our school books said so, yeah!", answered Snotlout, as if that were enough proof. And yet, even I remember distinctly that our elementary books said so. Humanity just up and appeared 300 years ago and we built our civilization just like that.

And yet, when you really think about it...

"But doesn't that seem odd?", said Elsa. "If you think about it and compare our society's development... we're not advancing fast enough in our technology to have invented all the mechanisms we have today."

"It's also weird for me too", said Rapunzel. "All the art styles and techniques I've learned weren't invented by my teachers or any of our current artists... and yet, no matter how much I search, I can't find information about the first painters."

"And that's precisely the main fuel behind the Neo World Order Theory.", interjected Fishlegs. "It is true: A lot of the things we have now just seem to have popped out of nowhere, with no clear origin. And yet, no matter how much someone digs, no information exists about the far past, as if all that information had been destroyed."

"If all the information about the past is gone, then why should we care?", asked Tuff.

"Yeah, like, you told us this was going to be important, but it seems stupid to me.", said Ruff, looking bored.

Fishlegs deadpanned at the Twins' complain before taking one of the files in the middle of the table. "The reason I told you guys about the Neo World Theory is because I found this:"

And as he spoke, he showed us all the cover of the the file he was holding: Encased in blue leather, the words **"The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history and The School Life of Mutual Killing: A Report"** could be seen in gold lettering. Hope's Peak Academy's seal adorned the cover, and a name tag reading "Tadashi Hamada", most likely the author, could be seen on the lower right edge of the file.

"What the hell is that?", asked Flynn as soon as he saw the booklet. Fishlegs looked nervous before answering. "T-This... do you guys remember the folder North found in the Great Hall, the one that said that Monobear had already effectuated this plan before?"

We all nodded. Fishlegs gulped before he continued speaking.

"W-well... this file... and all the others...", he gestured to the pile of papers, "say what actually happened in Hope's Peak Academy."

...

"What?!"

"Why didn't you say so?"

"And you were wasting our time with this Neo World Order Theory bullshit when you could have told us this?!"

The rancorous reaction from our group was to be expected. Even I was a little surprised. Because really, this was important! This file could have information about our current situation and on the identity of the Mastermind! Fishlegs had literally thrown a piece of meat into a cage full of starved lions.

"Will you guys be quiet?!", shouted Fishlegs, managing to calm everyone down. "The reason I had to open with the Neo World Order stuff was because it relates to this!", the Ultimate Encyclopedia opened the file and eyed the contents before speaking. "This file... is a report based on events that happened 300 years ago, on the year 2009."

"Uh, Earth to Fish.", interrupted Merida. "Wouldn't that have happened in the year, uh...1709 if it was 300 years ago?"

"That's why I had to introduce the Neo World Order theory," answered Fish as he rolled his eyes. "Because this document talks about events that happened in the year 2009 BEFORE our era."

"Wait.", said Jack, looking a bit lost. "You're saying that there's two 2009s? As in, the... uh, Beta 2009, the year this document depicts, and the Alpha 2009, the one we're all familiar with?"

Well, wasn't that a doozy. Fishlegs nodded. "Right. So basically, this file proves the Neo World Order Theory correct. There WAS an era before the one we knew and... something ended it... and this file...", Fishlegs hesitated a little before speaking. "tells us what that 'cataclysm' was."

A sense of dread and curiosity filled me. All of this... all I was hearing, was absolutely unbelievable. And yet... Could this file be it? Could this be the thing that will shed light on our current situation.

Every single one of us was probably thinking about the same thing I was, as no one spoke, their faces pensive. Seeing that none was planning on interrupting him anymore, Fishlegs cleared his throat. "O-OK... I'm going to read to you all what is in this files... It's going to be a long read, so..." and after closing his eyes and sighing, the Ultimate Encyclopedia focused on the file on his hands and started to read, loud and clear.

"\_To the Future Foundation HQ\_"

\_"Tadashi Hamada, Ultimate Robotics Engineer and Future Foundation 6th Division Leader, reporting with my proposal for a solution of \_\_\*\*The Tragedy\*\*\_\_ our society is currently facing. After much digging, I have managed to recover records from an isolated and forgotten server from the \_\_\*\*Old Hope's Peak Academy\*\*\_\_ school system. It is my deep belief that we shouldn't bury the past and pretend it didn't exist; rather, we should study it and learn from it.\_"

\_"I have included my findings in this file. With this, hopefully you will come to see that \_\_\*\*The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history of old never came to end\*\*\_\_ and that the disaster we're facing right now is because of our negligence. Look over it, analyze it, and understand it. It is only after doing so that I came to believe that our only shot at a \_\_\*\*bright future\*\*\_\_ is to implement the \_\_\*\*Hope Restoration Program\*\*\_\_. I will rush to complete it while you guys at HQ read the file. We must act fast and yet carefully; We cannot make our actions known to \_\_\*\*Ultimate Despair\*\*\_\_ nor we can let them do as they please.\_"

\_"I hope you reconsider.\_"

\_"Everything is for the sake of a hope-filled future.\_"

\_"Tadashi Hamada."\_

"Who is that guy?", interrupted Tuffnut.

"Sounds like a student from Hope's Peak Academy...", muttered Peter.

Fishlegs nodded. "He is. He's actually our senior by two years. He was in Hope's Peak's Academy student record when I checked."

"But it says he's a Future Foundation guy too...", pointed out

Jack.

"From the context of the file... it seems Hope's Peak and the Future Foundation are affiliated.", added Elsa.

"So does that mean that they're not the ones that put us here?", asked Anna.

"I... dunno.", said Rapunzel, looking unsure. "If Monobear really turns out to be affiliated with Hope's Peak... then that means the Future Foundation are the bad guys."

"I don't think so.", I spoke up. "See the end of the letter? He said... \_"For the sake of a \_\_\*\*hope-\*\*\_\_filled future"...\_that doesn't sound like Monobear at all.

Everyone nodded at that. By now it was impossible to deny that Monobear was enamored with despair. It clearly went against the Headmaster's beliefs, this Future Foundation.

"So I guess this makes the Future Foundation the good guys.", concluded Snotlout.

"What is this \*\*Tragedy\*\* stuff, though?", asked Merida.

"And this... \*\*Ultimate Despair...\*\* Do they have anything to do with Hope's Peak Academy?", asked Tooth.

"Allow me to continue, and you'll see.", said Fishlegs with a finger raised, and after clearing his throat, he continued to read.

"\_\*\*On the subject of The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history:\*\*\_"

\_As many proponents of the Neo World Order Theory know, myself included, humanity has existed for far more longer than the general populace knows. Indeed, our beginnings are far more humble and ancient and our current culture only came to exist after literal hundreds and billions of years passed. However, this civilization of yore came to an end due to a certain cataclysm.\_

\_This cataclysm was known in the ancient world as \_\_\*\*The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history\*\*\_\_.\_ \_

\_It's hard to believe that a whole civilization came to an end, especially in such a world-wide scale. While it is not unusual for small towns or islands to be devastated by natural disasters, to think that a calamity engulfed the entire world and destroyed past human civilization like so is... bone-chilling.\_

\_It's even more baffling when one takes into account the fact that this calamity was man-made. But perhaps the most baffling of all is the origin of this calamity; \_\_\*\*Old Hope's Peak Academy\*\*\_\_.\_ \_

"Wait, what?", interrupted Flynn. "C'mon, Fish... you can't expect me to believe that the world almost ended because of a school?!"

"But this isn't just any school.", reprimanded Peter. "This is Hope's Peak Academy we're talking about."

"Certainly, Hope's Peak Academy is an important institution, and we all know that a lot of important figureheads in our world graduated from there... so it isn't an exaggeration when one says that Hope's Peak Academy is the root of our world's hope..." said Elsa, looking pensive.

"But, still! In the end it's just a school!", argued Snotlout. "How can a school end the world?"

"I was getting there.", said Fishlegs, looking annoyed. "Don't interrupt me, please."

"\_Yes, I can see how ridiculous that sounds, especially when one takes into consideration our Hope's Peak Academy. The school, along with our very own Future Foundation, has been striving to better the world's future, producing new technology, leaders and bright minds in order to lead society to a hope-filled tomorrow.\_

\_In truth, the \_\_\*\*Old Hope's Peak Academy\*\*\_\_ once held the very same ideals as us, but they had a distinct difference.\_

\_While our very own Hope's Peak Academy values all talent, even those from the \_\_\*\*Reserve Course Students\*\*\_\_, the old Hope's Peak Academy \_\_\*\*did not.\*\*\*\_

\_And it was that difference... that single, small difference would be the trigger of \_\_\*\*The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in Hope's Peak Academy \*\*\_\_and the catalyst for the The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history."\_

"They... Hope's Peak Academy actually values the Reserve Course riffraff?", said Peter, looking shocked.

Merida looked at him with a disapproving glance. "Of course they did. They're still students."

"Talent or no talent... it doesn't matter in the end." I told him, drawing his attention. "They're still people; they still have dreams, hopes, they still work hard and they still have lives.", and as I said that, I could sense Jack looking at me. "If Hope's Peak Academy can understand that and you can't... can you really say you're an Ultimate?"

I... may have gone a bit overboard there... but thankfully Peter didn't snap back. Instead, the teen stayed silent as he processed this information.

Fishlegs nodded once he saw no one was going to keep talking and continued:

\_\*\*"On origin of The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in Hope's Peak Academy\*\*\_\_:\_

\_The root of the incident started on the Old Hope's Peak Academy \_\_\*\*Reserve Course.\*\*\*\_

\_Much like our current school, Old Hope's Peak Academy was heavily dedicated on its pursuit of and studying of talent. However, the Old Hope's Peak Academy was founded on a different belief. The original

Headmaster and founder, \_\_\*\*Izuru Kamukura,\*\*\_\_ deeply believed that talent was hope itself. Thus, Hope's Peak Academy was established in order to study talent. This studying and nurturing of talent wasn't without a goal, though. It was Headmaster Kamukura's dream to create a super genius who possessed many talents. This genius, this student, was to lead humanity to a better, hope-filled future. This drive to create the \_\_\*\*Ultimate Hope\*\*\_\_ was the sole reason beyond Old Hope's Peak Academy's creation.\_

\_However, despite the fact that \_\_\*\*Old Hope's Peak Academy\*\*\_\_ was funded by the government, it was soon apparent that the current funds at the school's disposition weren't enough to reach this goal. Desperate to get more funds to furnish their project, named the \_\_\*\*Izuru Kamukura Project \*\*\_\_after the founder, the Committee at Hope's Peak Academy established the \_\_\*\*Reserve Course\*\*\_\_\_. \_

\_By the time the course was established, Hope's Peak Academy's brand name was well-known and many students desired to enter the school, even if they didn't have an Ultimate talent. The school knowingly exploited this desire and allowed normal students to attend the school if the students payed exorbitant amounts of money.\_

\_However, unlike our current reserve course, the old Hope's Peak Academy \_\_\*\*didn't offer the same benefits to their own Reserve Course Students.\*\*\_\_ Instead, they were delegated with second-rate classes, lessons and teachers. They were also constantly mocked by the main branch of the school.\_

\_It is safe to say that the discontent in the Reserve Course was a ticking bomb. A threat that went unacknowledged by the arrogance of the Old Hope's Peak Academy Committee. And a threat... recognized by \_\_\*\*Ultimate Despair\*\*\_\_\_. "\_

Fishlegs closed the file he was handling and grabbed another.  
"Sorry... the original file was too thick so it was apparently separated in different parts."

"Where did you find all this?", asked Anna.

"Oh, um...", Fishlegs suddenly looked very nervous. "I... I found it in the MiM Library. A-after the Class Trial, I couldn't sleep so I decided to investigate a bit and read and... I found this behind a shelf."

"S-shall I continue?", asked the Ultimate Encyclopedia as he opened up the next part of the file, one enclosed in green leather.

"\_\*\*Ultimate Despair and their Involvement in The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in Hope's Peak Academy:\*\*\_"

\_Unbeknownst to the Committee, among the student body of Old Hope's Peak Academy existed one girl different from her Ultimate peers. This student, operating under the alias of Ultimate Fashionista, had only one motivation and belief in life: \_\_\*\*Despair and the spreading of despair itself.\*\*\_\_

\_"The name of this student was Junko Enoshima, who referred to herself as the \_\_\*\*Ultimate Despair.\*\*\_\_"

"T-that...!"

Upon hearing Fishlegs speak, I immediately shouted and stood up from my seat. "That sounds exactly like Monobear!"

"Hic is right.", said Jack, his jaw tense and his knuckles white due to the strain as he clenched his fists. "That... definitely sounds like Monobear. Does this mean...?"

"Is that girl... the cause of everything?!", asked Tooth, looking livid.

The Ultimate Encyclopedia yelped and backed off, before regaining his composure. "W-Will you guys let me finish reading?! If you do, you'll have your answers, so settle down, OK?!"

I sat down, a bit embarrassed. Fishlegs was right, I should stop interrupting. The Ultimate Encyclopedia cleared his throat and looked down at the file again.

"\_Based on the information I found about Enoshima, she was apparently a very charismatic girl, capable of manipulating and convincing people into her dogma. Enoshima claimed that she never yearned for hope or for a future or anything aside from despair. Despair defined her and she only yearned to spread this emotion to everyone.\_

\_Using her wits and charisma and manipulative ways, Enoshima lured an unknown number of Ultimate students into a group created by her called \_\_\*\*Ultimate Despair\*\*\_\_; a group dedicated to spread despair to all mankind under Enoshima's command.\_

\_This group... eventually set their eyes on the\_\_\*\* Ultimate Hope Project, also known as the Izuru Kamukura Project\*\*\_\_\_. \_

\_\*\*On the Izuru Kamukura Project:\*\*\_

\_Old Hope's Peak Academy eventually succeeded in the creation of their perfect genius. Using the Reserve Course Students as lab rats, the Committee eventually settled in using one of the drop outs of the course due to their unnatural love and loyalty to the Academy. This student, \_\_\*\*Hajime Hinata\*\*\_\_, eventually was transformed into \_\_\*\*Izuru Kamukura\*\*\_\_ after a countless number of inhumane experiments and brain surgeries. Hope's Peak Academy deliberately destroyed any kind of hobby or memory that would interfere with the acquisition of talent, essentially erasing Hajime Hinata from existence."\_

"T-that's... that's horrible..."muttered Rapunzel.

"Yeah... wh-what gives them the right...?", agreed Jack.

I could hardly believe... that the Old Hope's Peak Academy could go to such extremes. They were only trying to help mankind, sure, but this? This was too much... Fishlegs continued reading.

\_\*\*"The Tragedy of Hope's Peak Academy:\*\*\_

\_Unfortunately, Hope's Peak Academy never got to enjoy their success, because soon after, Enoshima and Ultimate Despair made their move. After kidnapping Kamukura and \_\_\*\*the fifteen members of Hope's Peak



Academy Student Council\*\*\_\_, Enoshima and Ultimate Despair organized the prototype for the \_\_\*\*School Life of Mutual Killing\*\*\_\_.\_

\_In the end, Kamukura ended up murdering the entire Student Council, and succumbed to Ultimate Despair. Hope's Peak Academy was distraught. Their perfect genius, their Ultimate Hope... had done something unforgivable. All their years of toiling away, all their efforts, all the money put into this... it was likely because of those feelings that the Committee hid Kamukura's actions and the incident.\_

\_Enoshima used that action to further her plan.\_

\_Unknown to Hope's Peak Academy, Ultimate Despair had broadcasted the entire thing to the Reserve Course Students. To say that they were outraged beyond belief was an understatement. After all, this had only happened because Hope's Peak had used all their money to create Kamukura. And now they were trying to hide a murdered in order to protect their image. And they were still exploiting the Reserve Course students despite all this.\_

\_Ultimate Despair \_\_\*\*willingly riled up the Reserve Course \*\*\_\_to protest against Hope's Peak Academy. The protests evolved to revolts as Ultimate Despair manipulated the student body behind the scenes. The Reserve Course's rebellion turned into an uprising so large, Hope's Peak Academy was forced to shut down its doors due to the increased violence, destruction and death toll within its walls.\_

\_And thus came the end of the Old Hope's Peak Academy. But that was only the beginning."\_

...

"Th-this... has to be a sick joke...!", said Peter in a strained voice. "T-there is no way... Hope's Peak Academy was destroyed."

Suddenly, I remembered Jack's dream. Surely, his dream had nothing to do with the destruction of Old Hope's Peak Academy. After all, that was more than 300 years ago. But the fact that it was eerily similar...

The whitette was visibly shaking, no doubt put off because he had made the connection.

Fishlegs continued, looking a bit pale.

"\_\*\*The biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history:\*\*\_"

\_At first, it was optimistically thought that everything would calm down soon, as it was customary of peaceful protests, but the situation worsened and quickened its pace. The incident moved on to the Internet, and formed a community of its own. \_

\_Soon, not just students were involved. It came to include people of various races and nationalities in its development and spread off the internet and into real life. \_

\_At the beginning of the incident, it involved demonstrations regarding social issues, but as it spread through the world, its abnormality began to show. At some point in time, the motives and modus operandi changed, and left behind only meaningless destruction and violence.\_

\_Strong people killed weak people...\_

\_Weak people murdered even weaker people...\_

\_Weak people formed factions and lynched strong people\_

\_As the violence and death spread, people became desensitized. As if time had gone backwards, people took death to become a certainty. The media reports overflowed with death, and people ate as they watched. By the time the world had noticed the abnormality, it was already too late.\_

\_The overpowering "despair" became a huge wave that swallowed up the world in the blink of one's eye...\_

\_Soon, terrorists and coup d'etats sprang up and caused the despair that is war. It wasn't war that happened due to the clash of ideals, religion or profitsâ€¦It was just war. \_

\_Pure war. \_

\_Therefore, no way to solve the problem was found. Naturally, this change on the nature of the revolts in Hope's Peak Academy came to be because of... the existence of "a certain group of people".\_

\_Ultimate Despair.\_

\_Their talents, recognized by Hope's Peak Academy, were used not "for the sake of causing hope for humanity"... They used their talents "for the sake of causing despair for humanity". Those tainted by Junko Enoshima joined her cause, even those who weren't students at Hope's Peak anymore, but still held positions of power in the real world. Those who held great power brainwashed ordinary citizens to spread despair...\_

\_Those who had talent with computers created software to spread despair...\_

\_Those who had great influence over people created new ideals to spread despair.\_

\_Those who had talent with bio weapons created new diseases to spread despair.\_

\_Those who had expertise in weaponry and war waged destruction against the world to spread despair.\_

\_Using Hope's Peak influence, students and ex-students against them, Enoshima managed to spread her despair to the entire world.\_

\_This is how the biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history was produced."\_

...

...

No one spoke. What... could we say? What we were hearing... was completely and utterly crazy. Unbelievable. How had a single girl...? Well, not really a single girl but... but no matter how one looks at it, it sounds ridiculous, and yet...

And yet...

Fishlegs put down the file and picked up the last one, bound in red leather.

"Th-this is a prank from Monobear, right?", asked Anna, looking pale. "I mean... this just sounds so... unbelievable."

"S-seriously... a single girl ended the world on a whim...?", said Flynn as he laughed nervously, running a hand through his brown locks. "I mean, who would buy into this whole 'despair' bullshit?!"

"Many of... our current leaders, both political and religious, can influence large numbers of people with their ideology if they're charismatic enough. When you see it in that light... it certainly seems more plausible.", added Elsa, looking perturbed.

"B-but I don't want it to be plausible!", shouted Merida. "I mean... don't ya get it? The world ended because of that girl! And now... and now Monobear... is spouting the same crap as 'er! And I-I..."

"Calm down, Merida.", said Rapunzel as she put a placating hand on the red-head's very own. "Can't you see how our Headmaster acts? There is no way he can convince anyone to follow his doctrine, he isn't charismatic enough."

Somehow, that simple way of seeing things lightened my mood a little. But to say that this hadn't set some alarms in my head would be a lie.

Junko Enoshima...

Monobear...

What is the connection?

Fishlegs continues his reading, his face clearly perturbed despite the fact that he had read this before, and I couldn't blame him for that reaction.

**\*\*School Life of Mutual Killing\*\*:**

\_Due to the continuous war and death, the world entered a dark age. Hope's Peak Academy, concerned about its surviving students, closed its doors as a teaching institution and became a shelter for the survivors of the Tragedy at Hope's Peak Academy. Their intent was to protect the last of mankind's hope and wait for the incident raging outside to calm down. Thus, 16 students and the Headmaster at the time, Jin Kirigiri, started their work on fortifying the school building.\_

\_Unfortunately for Jin Kirigiri, he had unknowingly "rescued" two members of \_\_\*\*Ultimate Despair.\*\*\_\_

\_Those two turned out to be \_\_\*\*Junko Enoshima herself \*\*\_\_and \_\_\*\*Mukuro Ikusaba\*\*\_\_, Enoshima's younger sister. That was the interesting thing about Ultimate Despair. Unlike some organizations, Ultimate Despair had no public leader. In fact, Hope's Peak Academy probably never knew that the organizer of The Tragedy was in reality the Ultimate Fashionista. By manipulating her underlings in the shadows, Enoshima steered all suspicion away from her and sneaked into the school.\_

\_Once the students had secured themselves inside the school, Enoshima's plan was put on effect. Using technology from the Ultimate Neurologist she stole, Enoshima erased the memories of the other 14 students, effectively wiping out their whole school lives up until the point before they entered Hope's Peak Academy. As the biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history had occurred the same year they had started their school life, the students didn't know why they were trapped in Hope's Peak Academy to begin with.\_

\_Enoshima then \_\_\*\*executed \*\*\_\_the Headmaster and using Monobear, she instated the School Life of Mutual Killing, a game where only a student who kills another gets to leave the Academy, with Mukuro as one of the participants.\_

\_Enoshima used Monobear to goad the students to kill each other, using their desire to leave as a catalyst, and much like the prototype, she broadcasted the entire thing to the outside world in order to crush the remainders of the resistance by showing them that even \_\_\*\*mankind's hope would succumb to despair just to survive\*\*\_\_.\_

\_In the end, the last surviving 6 students banded against her and despite learning about the state of the outside world, decided to leave the school. Unable to inflict despair on the survivors of the School Life of Mutual Killing, she \_\_\*\*executed herself in order to experience the biggest despair of all; death\*\*\_\_.\_

\_And thus, the School Life of Mutual Killing came to an end, and so did Enoshima's deranged plan. The survivors of Hope's Peak Academy then went on to join the resistance, the \_\_\*\*Future Foundation\*\*\_\_ in order to assist them with their goal; Ending the biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history and rebuild the ruined world."\_

...

"I see...", I muttered. "So... Junko Enoshima IS dead."

"Well... that bitch would HAVE to be dead, Haddock.", said Snotlout, looking a bit relieved. "I mean, this shit happened a long time ago... "

"So I guess we can say that she is not behind this at all, then?", asked Tooth in a quiet voice.

"I guess...", added Jack as he nervously scratched his head. "But then that would mean... that some unknown person is behind Monobear

this time."

"But who could that be?", asked Anna, "I mean... could it really be Ultimate Despair again? Like... if we take the info on these files... wouldn't the fact that we have a new, peaceful era right now mean that the Future Foundation succeeded in their goal?"

"Oh yeah, if they did end up rebuilding the world or whatever, they had to have gotten rid of Ultimate Despair, no?", said Tuff, surprising me. I didn't think he had followed the entire thing.

"Still, the similarities between the School Life of Mutual Killing and our own Camp Trip of Mutual Killing go beyond the name; it is almost the same thing.", commented Elsa.

"In addition to that, didn't that Tadashi fellow mention at the beginning of the file something about "the current Tragedy our society is facing?", said Flynn.

"What does that even mean?", said Ruffnut, confused.

The small spot of dread that had sprouted in my stomach started to grow as I remembered the article I had found in the Final Dead Room. And then, I remembered the writing on the walls of that room... It definitely said "\*\*\*The Tragedy" \*\*and "\*\*\*Neo World Order\*\*\*" in the walls...

Fishlegs cleared his throat as he grabbed the single piece of paper that he had retrieved from Snotlout. "There's... one last thing." At that, everyone paid close attention; maybe that last sheet of paper had the answers we were looking for?

The Ultimate Encyclopedia began to read:

"\_As you can see, humanity has toiled away to erase the scars of the biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history. In fact, our current world leaders have put every effort in order to erase the past by deliberately destroying historical records and manipulating the general populace's mind through some unknown they hope to seal away the dangers of Ultimate Despair so that the Tragedy never repeats?\_"

\_It is my belief that this is not the way to go. Averting our eyes to the problem will not erase it, as we're all aware now. Instead, we must face the adversity head-on, which is why we must enact the Hope Restoration Program immediately before it is too late. Underestimating our enemies will surely be our downfall; we cannot allow a repeat from the biggest, most awful, most tragic event in human history. We must find a cure to the \_\_\*\*Despair-Syndrome\*\*\_\_ and protect our future. We must save the Remnants of Hope and protect the Ultimate-\_"

"And... the file ends there.", finishes Fishlegs, looking tired.

That... raised even more questions than answers.

But there's something clear to us right now.

"Something... something big is happening outside the walls of this camp.", I muttered, and that snapped everyone out of their contemplative daze.

"W-what do you mean, "something big"?!" asked, Snotlout.

"Surely you aren't suggesting that the world has ended or something, right, kiddo?", said Flynn, looking nervous.

"No, I...", I said as I pointed to the files in the middle of the table. "I mean... surely you guys got that from the things we just heard, right? There's a reason why that Tadashi guy wrote these files, no?"

"What if they're just a prank from the Headmaster?", asked Tooth. "I mean, what if that Tadashi isn't even real?"

I shook my head. "No, I believe he does exist. After all, I found proof of his existence in the Final Dead Room."

"Oh? This is the first I've heard of that.", said Elsa through narrowed eyes. "And when were you planning to share this information with us?"

"I... uh, was planning to do so today, honest.", I said as I put my palms up as if I were swearing an oath.

"What is this 'proof', you speak of, Haddock?", asked Peter, looking interested.

"As a reward of sorts for beating the Final Dead Room.", I said as I made air quotes with my hands, "Monobear gave me a newspaper article that looked old.". I gulped as I recalled the contents of the newspaper. "The newspaper... makes mention of The Tragedy this Tadashi is talking about... and something about riots and Monobears?"

The silence that followed was broken by Tuffnut's incredulous laugh. "OK, OK... you're trying to scare us, I get it... now can you tell us what the newspaper really said?"

... I gave Tuffnut my most serious stare, and the Ultimate Demolition student's expectant smile vanished as he registered how serious I was being.

"B-but... can we be sure of the veracity of these documents?", asked Anna, looking scared.

"Regardless of the accuracy of this report and Haddock's article about the status of the outside world...", began Elsa, "There is something that is clear: This Camp Trip of Mutual Killing... is certainly linked to the School Life of Mutual Killing."

"But how can that be?!", shouted Snotlout. "I mean... Ultimate Despair is gone, no?! That is why we were able to live peacefully, according to that Tadashi, no?! So why? Why the fuck are we going through this?!"

"I dunno about Ultimate Despair bein' truly gone..." said Merida as she eyed the paper in Fishlegs' hand. "I mean, that Tadashi bloke

talked about 'em as if they were still kickin' and messin' stuff up."

"Apparently, its because of them that the Future Foundation is trying to enact the Hope Restoration Program...?", said Rapunzel as she trailed off. "I wonder what that is...?"

"And this whole business about finding a cure for the Despair-Syndrome...", said Tooth as she closed her eyes. "Could that be a disease?"

"Ain't any disease I ever heard of, and believe me, I've traveled enough of the world so I know my share of weird diseases.", said Flynn, sounding very confident.

"So, in the end...", began Jack as he scratched the top of his head. "We learned that..." the whitette suddenly brought up his right hand, and started to list things off.

"Our world has actually two timelines... the Beta and Alpha ones... and we've learned that this split happened because of The Tragedy that happened in the Beta 2009."

"This Tragedy came to pass because of a group of students named Ultimate Despair."

"Their leader, Junko Enoshima, engineered the first Mutual Killing Game, and she died."

"And... now, someone is doing the same thing as her, and something may be happening in the outside world?", finished Jack, looking still confused.

"M-more or less...", I said, nodding to the whitette.

"H-hey! that last part... the outside world is definitely OK!", argued Snotlout.

"Still, I find it hard to believe...", began Rapunzel. "I mean.. even if something is happening in the outside world... shouldn't we have heard about it? I mean, I never heard about this Despair-Syndrome and... even if we're trapped inside these walls, we should have heard or at least gotten infected by the disease no?"

"Please don't say such ominous things...", pleaded Anna.

"But Solaris is correct.", interjected Peter. "Though we are unable to verify the accuracy of this whole 'Neo World Order' nonsense, we can at least conclude that this Despair-Syndrome rubbish is false. All of us are healthy and certainly not infected with any diseases."

"Agh! Who cares about that?!", shouted Snotlout. "We should be focusing on the bastard who is putting us through this! I mean... that bitch Junko is dead, no?! Then who is the Mastermind this time?"

"I still think the traitor is our most likely suspect.", said Peter as he zeroed in on Jack again. Ugh, not again. "And now that we know the origin of this whole Killing Game... I'd say the most suspicious

among us is the Reserve Course Student, no? After all... it gives him a motive."

OK, I had enough. I know Jack didn't want this to come to light, but I... I-I can't let this keep going!

"For your information, Peter,", I said, without stuttering for once, "You are way off-base. Jack is not a Reserve Course Student."

The Ultimate Fear Expert's face was... conflicted to say the least. "What are you talking about, Haddock? You saw it in his file... he is most definitely a Reserve Course Student--"

"And that's where you're wrong.", I argued back. "Because Jack is actually an Ultimate. His DVD, the one Monobear gave us, says so."

Immediately, the eerily yellow eyes of Peter focused on Jack. "Overland. Is this true?!"

The whitette, who until now was taking the abuse with a clenched jaw, jumped a bit, before speaking. "Y-yeah... I...", he sighed. "You know that file you found Pitch? The one that had that picture of me with brown hair? That's actually my little brother... He... he is the one from the Reserve Course... I...", his blue eyes seemed to exude courage as he looked at the Ultimate Fear Expert with defiance. "I was chosen by Hope's Peak Academy."

The expression on Peter's face was priceless.

"That's... ludicrous... a twin brother?! Why, that is the most--"

"The most cliched of all cliches, I know... but what can I say? I mean, this IS a mystery story, after all. Cliches are bound to exist! I mean, heck, we have the amnesiac and the twin brother in one package! It's an extra concentrated bag of cliché for the price of one!"

Monobear's sudden interruption... made a lot of us scream. No, not just me. I swear, I wasn't the only one.

"You... what are you doing here?!", spit Tooth, looking extremely angry at the Headmaster. Of course, the plush toy ignored her and continued talking jovially.

"Geez, I always hated History Class. Learning about the past and such... it's extremely boring and a pain in the ass, don't you think?", the Headmaster put his paws on his snout to cover up a snicker. "I mean, you start to learn about the true nature of the world and then your whole point of view changes... Really, learning that you were oblivious to the truth sucks! No wonder they say that ignorance is bliss!"

"So... you're saying that the contents of those files... are the truth?", said Elsa, her voice slightly giving away the fact that she was aghast.

"Yup yup. Only the truth for my favorite students.", said Monobear as he patted his belly with a proud smile.



"Never mind that.", said Peter, looking beyond himself. "I... need to know. What Jack is saying... is that the truth?! No, he must be lying... he must be! He has to be the traitor that is controlling you, right?!"

Monobear looked at Peter with indifference, smirking all of a sudden as if he found the raven-haired teen's confusion funny. "Huh? Of course Jackie is telling the truth! I mean, really, did you think I was going to let a Reserve Course Student here again? I'm through with repeating plot twists! Of course that guy isn't controlling me either! He's too dumb for that!"

"Touche...", murmured Ruffnut.

Peter... looked like he had been hit by a Grunkle. He looked seriously perturbed by this revelation. Hopefully... that will make him leave Jack alone. I can't stand people who look down on others...

"Anywho...", said Monobear as he looked at us with a tilted head. "What are you bozos doing reading here? It's a pretty nice day outside, and you're wasting it reading like nerds?"

"I thought you wanted us to study...", mumbled Flynn.

"Yes yes... exercising the brain is nice, but what about the body?", asked Monobear. "I worry about your health, you know... which is why I came to inform you guys about a new area I've opened up for you!"

"A new... area?", prodded Jack.

"Yes! The **\*\*Drill Grounds\*\*** have been unlocked!", proclaimed Monobear as he lifted a paw in the air triumphantly. "Go and use the installations there! Break a sweat! Tone those muscles! It's a veritable area to fortify your body and soul! I'll be waiting for you there! You'll soon see why I am the self-proclaimed King of the Jungle Gym! Nyohohoho!"

And as usual, Monobear disappeared after his spiel of nonsense was finished, leaving us mentally exhausted.

But... a new area, huh?

"Man, I'm pooped.", complained Ruffnut.

"Yeah, totally. I hate studying and reading.", agreed Tuffnut.

"...I was the one who read all of that, you know...", corrected Fishlegs as he collapsed on a chair.

"So in the end, even though we learned a lot of stuff, we also didn't get any answers? I'd say this day was a waste.", said Flynn as he reclined on his chair.

"Yeah, no kiddin'," agreed Merida. "I wanna check out the new area but I ain't in the mood. How 'bout we check it tomorrow?"

"I have no objections.", said Elsa, "To be honest, I'd rather spend

this day... by myself. I'm still not fully recovered from yesterday..."

At that, no one spoke. It was true. We were trying our best to not let it show, but the fact that we had lost two people recently was heavy in our minds.

Especially for me...

"Well, if it's OK with everyone, we'll end the meeting today.", said Tooth, "We'll reconvene tomorrow and then we'll explore the new area together, OK?"

A mumbled sense of agreement could be heard from our group. We finished our meals in silence, and before long, we all went our separate ways.

\* \* \*

><p>I immediately set off to my cottage. I had... a lot to think about. All the information I heard today was still hard to swallow. And yet... Monobear claimed it to be the truth. It's funny, really, how much my view of the world has changed since I came here. Apparently, this was the norm in this camp. I wondered how much more was my view of the world going to change?<p>

...

It... had changed enough... when Toothless died. Suddenly, tears started to form in my eyes as I remembered the dream I had this morning. When this started, Toothless and I were antsy to get back to the skies. We wanted it so much, that I even started to construct a new tail fin for him... and yet...!

And yet now...! I couldn't even finish it...!

And now, I'll never be able to fly with him again. Never be able to share that special, private moment with him...!

Because... because he's gone...

I thankfully reached my cottage before anyone could see me as I started to tear up. I wanted to... be alone for a moment. Or for a while. Or for a long time. I...

I had been trying to act tough all this time, but I couldn't keep up that farce anymore. It was evident in my screams that left my throat sore. It was obvious in my violent sobbing and my never-ending tears. I missed Toothless a lot. My companion, my confidant, my supporter... my friend. I had been a fool, trying to make myself think I didn't miss him that much. How could I even think like that?! He... he was... my best friend! How could I even begin to think that I wouldn't miss him if he died?!

I truly am a horrible person and a terrible friend...!

So, without trying to fool myself anymore. Without telling myself lies. Without trying to sidestep my emotions, I wept. For how long, I don't know. And I didn't care. Not when the sun started to set. And not when the darkness of the night covered the camp.

I didn't care about any of that at all. I grieved the loss of my friend... until I felt asleep. And even then, I'm sure... I've wept for him too, while I dreamed.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I saw Hiccup lock himself in his cottage, but I didn't follow him. Somehow, I knew... he wanted some time alone. The little Viking had been trying to put on a strong front, but it was obvious he was still shocked about the death of Toothless. So... even though I wanted to be by his side right now, trying to console him, I refrained.

He... needed this.

I didn't do much for the rest of the day. I just wandered around the Camp, greeting the other guys. It was interesting, really, how the attitudes of most of them had changed. Aside from Mer, Hic and Punzie, everyone had always looked at me with distrust. But thanks to Hic, everyone had started to greet me in a less guarded manner. I was thankful, really. I didn't like to be shunned and being able to play around with everyone again like this... was such a weight off my shoulders.

Pitch avoided me today, much to my surprise. He usually... insulted me whenever he saw me. And yet, it seems Hic's revelation affected him quite a bit. Not that I was complaining; I was getting tired of his constant grudge against me. Looking back, it was silly of me to have kept that DVD a secret; I guess I didn't think any of the others would believe me? Thankfully, Hic spoke up for me, and it seems that now this whole issue has been resolved.

...That leaves our whole situation pending, though. We learned a lot about the origins of our situation. And yet, the circumstances surrounding our Camp Trip of Mutual Killing still were a mystery. Who was behind this? Why were they doing this? Those things still have no answers.

As I returned to my cottage after a whole day of wandering about, I passed Hic's cottage. As I looked at the building, its rustic exterior being bathed in the dusky evening, I felt a sense of resolve. Hic... had been hurt a lot by this whole thing. He had lost someone incredibly important to him. And I... couldn't forgive that. I couldn't forgive the one who was responsible behind this.

A lot of lives were being torn apart because of the Headmaster's will. And I... there was no way I was going to let that bear off the hook.

I... don't know who I really am. Maybe I am not that special. I may be not that smart, nor that strong compared to the other guys. But I'm going to do my best. I'm going to believe... in the "Jack" that Hic believes in. He probably... doesn't love me... like I do, but I'm not going to let that stop me. Starting tomorrow... I'll do my best to win him over. I don't have any experience on 'dating' or anything, but...

Those moments where I held him while he cried himself to sleep were

precious to me; that's when I realized how important the well being of that little viking was to me. So... I will do my very best to keep him safe. And I want to do so by staying by his side.

It is with that resolution that I enter my cottage and I prepare to go to bed.

It's going to be hard. It's going to be difficult. In the end, I'm not even guaranteed success. In fact, I may end up hurting myself. But... I at least want Hic to know how much he means to me.

So I'll just believe... that if I do it, things will turn out OK.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- MONOBEAR THEATER -<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Lately, I've been thinking... wouldn't the world be much better if we started to put all those unemployed bozos in factories? It would truly end unemployment!"<p>

"Whuzzat? What are we going to do with the current employees? Why, if we run out of positions for jobs in the factories, we can always give the current employees some nice vacations, they deserve it!"

"Huh? You're saying that would make the current employees 'unemployed bozos' too?"

"..."

"Ah well, what do I care anyway? I'm a popular videogame mascot! Like I have to worry about unemployment, n-no sir! I was just saying!"

"(please send work to studlymonochromebear11307 at zetsubou dot com)"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I... I really hope I didn't confuse you guys with this chapter. I know it was a long one with a lot of new concepts but please bear with me as we dive deep into these new mysteries.<strong>

\*\*As usual, Free Time Events are open! Please do sound off in your reviews which 3 characters you want to hang out with. \*\*

\*\*That's all I'm gonna say for now. See ya next time!\*\*

\*\*(now i should probably work on my other fics but uh...)\*\*

## 27. 3 - Chapter 3 - Daily Lives B

\*\*Chapter 3 - Despair-Syndrome - Daily Lives B\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>OK, Hijack March Madness and my other fic side-tracked me a lil', but we're back to our regular schedule. Or maybe not, since I got a job again. <strong>

\*\*I liked writing this chapter. Danganronpa music really inspires you to write danganronpa au fics, surprisingly. "Beautiful Dead" is such a nice track. \*\*\*\*In any case, enjoy!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

A groan escapes my lips as I read the message I just had sent to Merida. What compelled me to sent that IM to her? How could I even think that was a good idea?!

I had resolved to win Hic over. The thing is... I know nothing about romance. At all. I have heard of the concept of dating before, but as for the actual thing? I don't know anything about it! Which brings us to my current dilemma...

\* \* \*

><p>"hey mer uh... do you think you can help me? i need some dating advice..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>That message was being displayed on the "Sent" section of my ElectroID, taunting me. Why, oh why did I ever hit Send?! I should be worrying about all the things we learned about yesterday, about the Ultimate Despair, about the Alpha and Beta timelines... and yet here I am, asking for dating tips from Merida of all people!<p>

Why can't the earth just open up and eat me...?

The buzzing of my ElectroID fills me with dread. After hesitating for a few moments, I grab the card, its light filling my dark room with a blue hue. The message from the redhead is short and concise:

\* \* \*

><p>"jack its 2 in the morn' what the hell"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>What the hell is exactly right. Even I can't believe I'm asking this of her, but I'm desperate. With a bit of reluctance I send another message;<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"please mer this is important. can you pretty please tell me what to do on a date? I have no idea"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It hasn't been a minute since I send the message when the redhead's answer comes back, the sudden buzzing catching me off-guard.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"so youre finally makin' your move on the hiccup lad eh?  
;)"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>I groan as I read the message, letting my head hit the pillow. I don't want to be teased about this! This is serious! I'm... being incredibly serious about this! As I boil myself in my embarrassment (god why is it so hot all of a sudden?!), another buzz from my ElectroID comes. The message that reads is thankfully more merciful.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"you know, as much as i want to help you win over that nerd, i'm afraid i wont be of much help :"

"im not exactly a master at romancin' and stuff so you should probably ask someone like rapunzel or tooth"

"in any case, im rootin' for ya, you human snowflake ;)"

\* \* \*

><p>For some reason, I ended up feeling an immense sense of dread as I read those messages. I'm never going hear the end of it from Mer, huh? I'm going to be practically a walking tease target for her from now on. And now I have to confide on my crush to <em>someone else<em>?

Am I willing to put myself on the spot for that? Do I really want to suffer all that teasing and embarrassment?

An image of Hic flashes on my mind, his mop of brown hair swaying a little as a small chuckle escapes his slightly chapped lips, a genuine smile spreading through his face. How he tries to conceal that happiness by bringing a freckle-covered hand to cover his mouth.

I hit the new message button faster than I thought possible, leaving out any mention of Hiccup from the message, however, as I still find it too embarrassing to divulge the fact that I have a crush on the little guy.

I'm biting the neck of my shirt as I wait for an answer of my accomplice-to-be. I start to wonder if they're even awake as it takes a long while for them to respond back before the buzzing in my ElectroID comes. I quickly open the message and scan it thoroughly, as if my life depends on it:

\* \* \*

><p>"From: Rapunzel<p>

"Umm... sure. I've read a lot about romance and stuff so I don't mind helping you out, Jack!"

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

"YES!"

My shout is far more loud than necessary and on that moment, I'm happy our cottages are soundproof, though I still cover my mouth out of habit. With a surge of gleefulness in my heart, I start typing away.

\* \* \*

><p>"sooo what do you do on a date? ive never felt like this before and all of this is new to me so any help would be great!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rapunzel's answer can't come soon enough and as soon as it does I open it with a swiftness that surprises me.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hmm... well, according to the books I've read... a tried and true method is to take the person you like to a place they like and do some fun activities there..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Oh... well, that doesn't sound so hard. I'm all about fun, after all! And I know of a few places Hic would definitely enjoy. As I'm thinking this, however, a new message interrupts me, and I go to open it.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, just think of a place Hiccup would enjoy! I'm sure you'll come up with something, since you know him better than us!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>I blank out before the heat on my cheeks returns with renewed intensity. I instantly send my reply.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"i never said i was going to take out hic on a date!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Oh God... I feel like I'm going to die.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh? But I just figured... like, you and Hiccup are always together and you seem to always look at him with such fondness... so I just assumed... was I wrong?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rapunzel's message makes me groan for the third time as I facepalm. Was I... was I really being that obvious?! Does this mean... everyone knows?! Damn it... I'm going to die. I'm definitely going to die from all of this. Deciding that going through with this anyways is my only option, I thank Rapunzel for her help and I wish her good night, putting my ElectroID back into my pocket after I send the message.<p>

I turn on my side and I bring my hands to my face, covering it.

"\_What am I going to do?"\_

...I know what I have to do. I just have to do it. It's going to be... a piece of cake! I just have to ask Hic to hang out like always and I just have to give him the time of his life! And once... and once the mood is right, I'll tell him!

Yeah...! It's... it's going to go alright.

Repeating that as a mantra, I start to think of fun places to hang out in this dreadful camp, and I start to brainstorm for possible fun activities until sleep claims me, an unrestful lull for my busy brain.

\* \* \*

><p>Monobear's annoying morning announcement is not the perfect way to start a day, but there's nothing to be done about it. I grumpily get out of bed, my hair more of a bedhair case than usual, before I remember what I'm going to do today.<p>

All of a sudden, I'm more awake than ever as I remember that today I'm going to have a date.

...Oh god, what should I wear?! Should I... should I fix my hair?! I definitely need to bathe!

With a jump, I grab my nicest looking hoodie and some brown dress pants I liked a lot and I go straight to the bathroom. Guessing that Hic would get suspicious if I dressed differently than normal, I decide to go for the normal "Overland" look I always sport.

However, before I can even get into the shower, I notice something strange as I start to undress. Something... something that wasn't there yesterday is suddenly on me. Right there, on my left wrist is an object I definitely didn't have on me yesterday. A black bracelet is clamped tight on it, a logo similar to Monobear's red eye visible on it.

...What the hell is this thing?

\* \* \*

><p>The mood in the restaurant was predictably a turmoil of confusion and fear. Apparently, I wasn't the only one with the new accessory. Everyone had it on their wrists, and everyone was as confused as the other about their origin. According to everyone's account, they also just woke up with it.<p>



...I should have been more bothered about this situation, but truthfully, I was more upset about the fact that I had been the last to the restaurant and as such, the seats surrounding Hic were already occupied by someone else; Punzie, Mer and... Anna. The little Viking gave me a sheepish smile as he waved at me and I honestly wished I was next to him right now, but not trusting myself on not to act on this horrible feeling of jealousy towards the Ultimate Hiker who was looking at Hic with such adoring eyes, I decided to sit next to Flynn.

Snot was currently trying to pry off the bracelet, his face turning a bright shade of red from exertion, before giving up with a ragged breath. "It's no use... The damn thing is on tighter than a lid on a jar of pickles."

"Maybe some soap will help?", suggested Tooth, "You know... to make it slip off?"

Hic shook his head. "No... it won't go past our wrists. It's perfectly fitted to our proportions."

"It also seems to be 100% seamless.", said Fish as he studied the black bracelet with a lot of attention. "I can't find a clasp or anything."

"So, it's impossible to take it off?", asked a worried Punzie.

"Don't worry!", shouted Tuff, looking very devilish. "We'll get these off from all of you, easy as pie!"

At that moment, I dared to hope. "Really?"

"Yeah!", answered Ruff, a wide grin on her thin face. "We just need to figure out how many explosives it can take and then we'll be set to go!"

"We'll have to run some tests first, though... I'll be the test dummy!", said Tuff excitedly.

"What?! No, I want to be the test dummy!", complained Ruff, pushing her twin away and before long, the Twins were brawling it out again.

...Aaaand there go my expectations.

"NO! I WON'T ALLOW EXPLOSIONS!"

It's kinda funny how used I was getting to Monobear's sudden appearances. My heart still skipped a beat whenever he popped up, though. The bear was yelling at the Twins, who were grappling on the floor, with a very angry scowl. "Don't you guys remember the rules?! No more explosives on my camp!"

"...Besides, you guys would just end up losing an arm if you went through those tests...", muttered an annoyed Elsa.

"No pain, no gain!", shouted Tuff, looking pleased with himself.

"Please don't use motivational sayings to justify your destruction.", admonished Hic, as he rubbed his forehead with a groan.

"Yup yup! Pay heed to Hiccy! That's the only thing he's good for anyway.", said Monobear, with a snort, much to everyone's chagrin.

"What the hell do you want?!", shouted Snotlout, confronting the bear, though the Headmaster was hardly daunted by the difference in height.

"Oh, nothing, really.", said the Headmaster as he walked away from the Ultimate Heavy Lifter and jumped into the restaurant's table. "I just wanted to see everyone's reaction to my latest motive!"

At that, everyone froze. I chanced a glance at my bracelet. It didn't look any different; still black and with the same red mark on it.

"What do you mean... motive?", asked Pitch, who was deliberately avoiding my gaze. The Headmaster wagged his finger at the Ultimate Fear Expert, a shit-eating grin on his snout.

"That's a surpriiiiiiiise for you guys to find out later! I don't want to spoil it! I'm so done with that kind of plot element!", rambled the Headmaster as he rubbed his belly. "But don't worry, you guys will get sick from how amazing it's going to be when \_it happens\_... so please look forward to that!"

"What the hell do yo-", but Flynn's question was never heard by the Headmaster as he vanished as soon as he said his piece.

An awkward silence filled the restaurant. And understandably so.

It... it hasn't even been a day since that awful Class Trial, and Monobear is already forcing on us another motive...

"So... do you really think this is...?", asked Anna, looking at Hic for an answer.

The little Viking nodded. "I... I do. I don't think he's bluffing.", I could hear his voice waver a little as he spoke. "This... bracelet thing is going to be the next motive."

"Well, ain't this a lame one?", said Merida as she glanced at her bracelet with disdain. "How is he plannin' on makin' us kill each other with this? Fightin' over accessorizin'?"

At that, Punzie snickered, but Pitch was clearly not amused as he spoke. "We best not let our guard down. This is Monobear we're talking about."

"I have to agree.", said Elsa as she fiddled with her braid. "Seeing how he had no issue about conjuring a blizzard, we must be ready for anything."

"Yeah, this is the guy who also erased our memories.", added Fish, "We better be careful."

...That was easy to say, but since we don't actually know what to expect, we can't exactly be careful about... well, anything! Looking at the bracelet, I couldn't help but to feel uneasy... what could this mean...?

"In any case..."

Tooth's voice breaks the tense silence, as she looks at us with a tired smile. "Today we're going to check out the new area. We'll start at 2 PM and we'll spend the entire evening there. After that, we'll report our results like usual, OK?"

"Be sure to be on the lookout for more info about our captor!", added Fish, looking perhaps a bit too giddy for the current mood.

Everyone agreed. That was our only shot, anyway. We had to move forward and hope... hope that this time we will find something... perhaps even a way out!

...But first things first.

I turn to face Hic, psyching myself up to ask him out...

...and my grin fades as I see Anna speaking with him. Both of them smiling. And laughing.

...

...No. Calm down, Jack. They-they're just talking. No need to freak out.

It doesn't mean anything, really. Just play it cool and wait for your chance... y-yeah, that's right!

It almost seemed like hours, but Anna's chat with Hiccup probably only lasted a few minutes that felt excruciating. With a shy bow, the Ultimate Hiker bid good bye to the brunette, a faint blush on her cheeks that I found odious. The little Viking waved good bye with a nervous smile, and once the girl was out of sight, he sighed deeply. I was curious about what they were talking about but somehow I thought I didn't want to really know... and I doubt Hic would really tell me.

I collected myself, and walked up to the Ultimate Lucky Student with my most confident smile. Hic immediately brightened up as he saw me, though he seemed a bit guarded. Odd...

"Sup, Hic?"

"Nothing much. Just... another day in Murder Land.", he quipped, with a nervous smile. I decided to roll with that.

"Yeah, nothing quite like having a psycho bear trying to force your hand. Absolutely enjoyable." I said with a laugh. Hiccup thankfully smiled. I was afraid I had gone too far with that joke of mine, but the little Viking took it in stride.

"Well, looks like we're getting a reprieve, sort of.", said Hiccup with a shrug, and I took that as my chance.

"Yeah, we have a lot of free time in our hands, don't we?", I said, nonchalantly. "Hey! Wanna hang out? We could probably do something real fun to pass time.", I suggested, perhaps a bit too eager.

Thankfully, Hic didn't catch on, a look of contemplation decorating his freckled face as he pursed his lips. "Gee, do I want to spend my day with an hyper teen and risk injury to my personage when I could spend it doing something more productive?"

There it was, that sarcastic repertoire I've come to know and love. With a smirk, I prepare my retort. "Whatever could be more productive than spending the day with your best pal, the Great, the Amazing Jack Overland?"

At that, Hic snorts and rolls his eyes, but he doesn't seem to have an answer. Finally, with a playful smile, he nods. "Yeah, I guess you do have a point. I don't really have anything to besides having to talk to Anna, so yeah, I'm up for hanging out."

My spirits dampen a little as he mentions the Ultimate Hiker, but I try to not let it get to me; Hic... can talk to whoever he wants. I truly hate this feeling of jealousy in my chest but I... even though I want to keep Hic to myself... I don't want to become that kind of person.

Besides, Hic said they were only going to talk... so everything should be alright... right?

I try to push all the worst-case-scenarios out of my head and I smile at the brunette. "Perfect! How about we go for a swim?"

Hiccup's brow furrowed at my suggestion. "I thought you didn't know how to swim..."

At that, I put my arm around Hic's shoulder and I lean on him to tease the little Viking. "Hey, you did tell me you were going teach me how to swim, didn't you? C'mooooon, it will be fun!"

Hic rolls his eyes before he ducks out of my arm, a chuckle escaping his lips as I almost fall down to the floor. "Fine, I guess it's better than standing around doing nothing."

"That's the spirit!", I say as I give him a thumbs up. "So, how about we meet at the lake at noon?"

Hiccup hums before nodding, his messy locks bobbing a little with the motion. "Sure, no problem.", Hic sways from foot to foot as he starts to back away while swinging his arms. "So, I'll see you there?"

My nod comes faster than intended. "Sure! I'll catch ya later, Hic! You'll see, I'll be the fastest swimmer in this camp by the end of the day."

"Sure, whatever, Jack. Just don't become the best 'deadman's float' swimmer, OK?", he teases and before I can even think up of a witty retort, the little Viking exits the building. Damn, he won this time...

But I don't care! Because... because he said yes! He's... well, he

doesn't really know about it, but he said yes! He's going out with me.

In that moment, I forget all about our dire situation, about the new area, and this stupid bracelet and Monobear's threat.

Because... I'm going on a date with Hic!

With renewed energy and enthusiasm, I return to my cottage as I try to plan out my outing with the little Viking, trying to come up with the perfect game plan.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

I honestly am worried beyond belief.

This bracelet business is obviously bad news, and every time I glance at it, I can't help but to feel extremely nervous about it. Even more now that Monobear has claimed that this is his next motive. And yet, no matter how much I stare at it, I can't come up with something. How could this thing even force us to kill? Mind control? Maybe it will threaten to explode if we don't kill someone?

Not knowing anything about it makes it so much worse.

And I have given up on trying to get it off. Back in my cottage, I tried everything: Soap, bashing it against something (I only got a bruise which I'm thankfully covering with a long sleeved t-shirt), I even tried to disassemble it but with no visible hinges or anything, it was impossible.

Knowing there is a problem, and yet being unable to do anything about it... it's the worst feeling.

Add to that how empty I feel, how my life has suddenly turned more bleak... how my heart ached when I awoke this morning and I didn't hear the familiar knocks in my roof, and how there wasn't any black, scaly friend out there to greet me...

I just need to take my mind off from things.

Which is why I said yes to Jack's proposal to hang out. If anyone can brighten my day, it's that teen with a childish soul. I smile as I try to figure out what Jack is planning; no doubt a prank involving water... perhaps a water balloon fight? Even though my safety isn't guaranteed, I'd be lying if I said that I wasn't looking forward to my outing with the whitette.

...In more ways than one. This could be the chance I've been looking forward to...

And yet, I'm a little anxious as well.

As important as my feelings for Jack are, there IS something I should talk about with him. The contents of that file I got from the Final Dead Room... I'm not letting them get to me anymore, because I've resolved that the only Jack I care about is the one I know, but...

That file... has info that Jack should see... And yet, I'm afraid of his reaction... But I have to be honest with him about everything, and that includes this. Trust is essential in our situation and I... want Jack to trust me, just like how I trust him.

Still, it's going to be a difficult theme to broach... with a groan, I scratch my head, as if doing so will make me come up with a solution to everything. Resigning myself to simply going with the flow, I make my way towards the Camp Gates, the place where we awoke when we first arrived in the camp.

\* \* \*

><p>As I make my way through the forested path, the cool shadows of the towering trees above me giving me a reprieve from the hot, summer-like sun, I see in the distance a familiar sight: the school bus we arrived in is still parked in front of the enormous gates that are still locked shut. But that wasn't what had caught my attention.<p>

It was the girl who was fiddling with her braids, clad in a simple cyan dress with a black vest, her expression one of complete focus. I still don't know what Anna wants to talk about but judging by that expression, I assume it's something serious.

Trying to approach her with a smile to make the atmosphere not so tense, I greet her enthusiastically. Unfortunately, my greeting has the opposite effect, and Anna ends up jumping a bit while screaming. I never will understand how Jack does it...

The Ultimate Hiker quickly recovers, though, and she returns my greeting with a nervous smile. "H-hey, hello, what a coincidence seeing you here, Hiccup!"

I quirk an eyebrow. "Uh... yeah, but... you told me to come here yourself..."

She blanks for a moment before she laughs. "Oh yeah, that's right! Hahaha, silly me..."

I try to laugh a little at her self-deprecating comment but soon enough our laughter dies out, and all that is left is an awkward silence that seems to stretch forever, Anna stealing glances at me whenever she thinks I am not looking, and me simply staring at the girl, trying to come up with a topic to discuss.

This... isn't going very well...

Sick of the awkward silence, I decide to break it by going straight to the point. "So...", I begin, and as I do so Anna perks up, her attention entirely on me, "What did you want to talk about...? You said it was important..."

Upon hearing me, the Ultimate Hiker blushes and laughs as she moves a loose strand of hair dangling in front of her face back to where it belongs. What's up with her...? Usually, Anna is so bubbly and straightforward, so seeing her act like this is kind of off-putting.

I sincerely pray that Elsa is nowhere near. No doubt she would glare at me for making her sister act up like this.

"W-well... actually, Hiccup... there is something I wanttotellyou.", Anna answers, rushing her last words quite fast, her blush deepening once she sees my confused expression. Seemingly clamming up, I try to prod her with a wave of my hand. "Yeah? What is it?"

Suddenly, I'm very nervous too. What could possibly be so important that she had to resort to talking to me in private like this? ...Was she going to tell me something embarrassing about me that I hadn't noticed? Gods, what if I had been walking around the camp with my fly open this entire time?!

"Hiccup..."

Her voice snaps me out of my semi-nervous breakdown, and I find myself being started at with the most intense blue eyes and it honestly just makes me feel even more subconscious. Why is she staring so intently at me...?

"Hiccup, um... I...", she begins, her intense gaze falling apart as she closes her eyes. "I... I like you."

Huh?

...

Uh... is... is that it? Is that what she wanted to tell me? Is that the important thing she wanted to talk about? Anna seems to be waiting for an answer, and honestly, what else can I say?

"Oh, um... I like you too, Anna.", I say, trying to sound reassuring. Maybe she thinks I hated her or something? If so, I have to fix that misconception. "You're, uh... nice, and kind, and funny! You're... yeah, a very good friend!"

Anna stares at me with a blank expression before her face turns the brightest shade of red I've ever seen. "No, like... I... really, \_really, \_like you, Hiccup!", her voice rises in volume a little, as she tries to get her point across. "Like, I like you more than as a friend, if you know what I mean..."

...

...

Oh.

...

\_Oh.\_

...Um... Oh Thor... This...

This is a very uncomfortable situation. Oh Gods, now what?! What should I...

And she's looking at me with such a hopeful expression...! Oh no...

but I... I can't... Unfortunately, I cannot return her feelings. I just can't...

With a slight hiss, I begin rubbing my arm, my nervous tick out in full force. I really don't want to do this, but... "Uh... I see...! Th-that's great! That... that is really cool, yeah...!", Anna's expression becomes even more hopeful as I speak, and I have to close my eyes. I don't want to see what my words are going to do to her. "Unfortunateeeely... uh... I... don't like you like that? Yeah... yeah... I... we can still be friends though!", I finish with that lame offer.

...

...The moments of silence that pass between us are unnerving. I can only hear the soft breeze as it passes through the canopy of trees and that's all I want to focus on as I refuse to open my eyes.

"Oh."

Anna's voice is barely audible as she responds, and even though its just one word, I can feel the disappointment behind it. I feel like such a jerk.

Her small laugh catches me by surprise, and I have to open my eyes to see why she's laughing. And I regret it, because in doing so I can see the feeble tears running down her face. Damn it... I did this... I hurt her even though I didn't want to.

"It's alright... yeah, we can still be friends, right?", she says, mostly to herself as she shakes her head with a sad smile. "I mean, why would you even like someone like me, right? You probably are only interested in smart people, like you..."

"H-hold on, that's not-", I try to protest, but she puts up a shaky hand.

"It's alright, really! I'll... I'll be fine...", she says through her tears, a crestfallen expression so unlike her on her face. "S-so... I'll guess I'll see you around, Hiccup..."

And without waiting for an answer, she begins to leave. I truly feel like the worst as I see her trembling back leave slowly. Soon enough she's out of my sight, and yet the feeling of awkwardness still lingers around me

"...Sorry."

My unheard, useless apology only reaches my ears, as I'm left there, feeling inadequate and regretful. This... has been an incredibly rotten day so far. With a wistful sigh, I also make to leave the dark forest, which is only making my mood worse. The whole situation with the others is... going to be so awkward now...

Hopefully, the outing with Jack will go better than this. I want to believe that my day will end on a high note, if its even possible in a setting like this.

\* \* \*



><p>As I reach the Meeting Spot, I find an unusual sight right before me.<p>

Sitting on top of the speech booth Monobear used on the first day we arrived on this camp, was Snotlout, who was looking at the Camp's flagpole with a sullen face. He was just... sitting there, sighing at random intervals. The odd mechanism Monobear had installed was also there, its ominous countdown still ticking down as the remaining 16 DAYS are displayed on the LED screen.

...

Going against my better judgement, I approached the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, curious about what he was doing here. I had expected him to be by himself, but not in a place like this. Of course, upon seeing me, his contemplative face is replaced with a scowl and a very eloquent "The hell do you want, fishbone?"

Yeah, that sunny disposition of his. That's more like it.

"Oh, uh, nothing.", I lie, "I was just... you know, walking around when I noticed you were here, sitting all alone and I thought... hey! Why not greet Snotlout? Is that weird?"

Snotlout's expression pretty much tells me that yes, this is weird. The Ultimate Heavy Lifter proceeded to turn back to staring at the flagpole, ignoring me completely.

I don't know how much time passed as both of us stared at the fluttering flag with the camp's insignia on it, but it was far too long for my liking. I... didn't like this place at all. It brought back unpleasant memories from Sandy's and Astrid's case.

"I... really must have looked like an idiot..."

Snotlout's voice comes uncharacteristically low as he speaks, his eyes never wavering from the flagpole.

"Huh?" I must admit I'm a bit lost. Snotlout doesn't seem to mind, as he continues to speak, sounding a bit hesitant.

"Back at the Class Trial... with Astrid and all..."

Oh. Yeah... I remember now. Even though he was being framed for murder, Snotlout vehemently denied Astrid's involvement with the crime. Even though his life was at risk, his loyalty to Astrid was... exemplary, you could say. And I always wondered why he had done so.

"I was a fucking idiot...", he continues, his voice straining a little as he stares at the ground. "Even though I REALLY believed in her, she was just using me... she fucking hated my guts and try to pin everything on me... and I still defended her... I really am an idiot..."

I was taken aback when a single tear rolled down Snotlout's cheeks as he closed his eyes with a pained expression. I... never thought I'd see Snotlout like this. I had underestimated the toll that case had taken on the burly teen. How much Astrid's betrayal had hurt

him.

"You must really miss her...", I say, trying to comfort him. I never thought this day would come... but I honestly felt bad about this.

"HAH?! Miss her?!\"", Snotlout's outburst confuses me, as a he produces a disgusted smirk. "As if I would ever miss that conniving, two-faced bitch! Ha... miss her, he says..."

...

"I... I would never miss... someone like that..."

Snotlout's words are harsh, and yet... I can't help but to wonder... as I see another tear escape his eye... and as I see that crestfallen expression and fake smile... How much... of Snotlout's brash and rude attitude is an act...?

"Why am I even talking to you about this? You always... make me say weird stuff, you fucking fishbone.", and with an annoyed grunt, Snotlout jumps off the speech booth and stomps away, trying to hide away the fact that he had openly cried in front of me.

...I consider it a miracle that he didn't beat me up, but today... I saw a side of Snotlout I never expected to see nor that I ever thought it existed. It really is as they say; there's more to a person than what meets the eye.

\* \* \*

><p>As the time for my outing with Jack gets closer, I get increasingly more nervous.<p>

Don't get me wrong, I'm looking forward to it, but I will confess that... I hadn't fully registered the fact that I was going to be swimming with Jack.

...A Jack... without a shirt... a Jack that is going to need help to learn how to swim, most likely while I guide him through the motions... which may or may not need physical contact...

...Gods... this is ridiculous! Control yourself, Haddock!

Hoping that my swimsuit doesn't reveal what I'm really thinking about, I make my way to Lake Despair's shoreline, where Jack told me to meet him. I had decided to go with a simple white tank top, my green swimming trunks with dragon prints on the left leg and some sandals I had gotten from the supermarket.

Upon arriving there, I'm once again taken aback by the peaceful ambiance. The lake's surface is as pristine and calm as ever, and the shore is undisturbed and unchanged. It's hard to believe that murder can happen here.

Unwanted memories from the time we had that party... before the killings started... start to surface. And I have to close my eyes in order to try to forget all the fun we had been having... all the fun Toothless was having splashing around...

...Stop. Hiccup Haddock, you came here to have fun with Jack. Try... to not fall apart in front of him, OK?! You're a Viking... prove it!

After calming myself down, I made my way along the shore, searching for that familiar head of white hair. It took me a few minutes but soon enough I see Jack sitting down under a tree. He's wearing a gray tank top, the same blue swim trunks he had worn at the party and some brown flip flops. My heart races as I get near to him and I'm only a few feet away until he notices me. Flashing me one of his white, almost perfect smiles, he gets up nimbly and jogs over to me, and I can't help but to smile back.

"Sup, Hic?", he greets with a lazy wave.

"Eh, same old, same old.", I say with a shrug, trying to not stare too much at the whitette. I rock on my heels with my hands on my trunk's pockets before I speak. "So, uh... ready to learn how to swim?"

Jack gives me a thumbs up, yelling a "yes sir!", before he removes his top and oh Thor is it hot here or what. The Ultimate Mystery dumps his tank top to the side, thankfully not realizing I had been ogling, and he gives me a smile as he puts his hands on his hips, his eyes expectant. "So, what's the first lesson, sensei?"

That snaps me out of my staring. I give him a deadpan glare as I cross my arms. "Sensei? Really?". Jack just shrugs. I really have to wonder from where did he learn that word... just what kind of books has he been reading in the library?

...In any case, I... have to start this lesson. Being extremely self-conscious of the fact that Jack was going to see my less-than-appealing freckled and lanky body, I take off my tank top with a deep sigh. Quickly crossing my arms over my chest to cover myself up as much as I can, I fake a look of concentration before facing the lake.

"W-well... I guess the first thing we should do is... teach you how to actually float."

At that, Jack hums. With slow steps, we walk into the water, Jack looking more and more antsy with each step we take into the liquid. By the point we reach suitable enough water for practicing, he's displaying all but a nervous smirk on his face. I want to laugh, but I understand how it feels: this is a whole new experience to Jack so I should... probably motivate him.

Trying to pull off my most challenging smirk, I speak to Jack who is eyeing the water with a nervous stare. "What's the matter? Afraid of getting a little wet?"

Upon hearing that, Jack's expression changed to a challenging smile. "Hah! As if! Just you watch, Hic, I'll get so good at this, I'll practically become dolphin!"

That's more like it. I could see Jack was now truly motivated, the blue of his eyes a vivid hue, as he looked ready to take on anything. "Well, don't get \_too \_excited. Or else you will be forced to stay here in the water forever." I joked back.

We eventually started practicing swimming. Though Jack was filled with boundless energy, he actually paid attention to everything I said. He horsed around and got distracted yet he was a quick learner. Soon enough, he was able to do a pretty decent front crawl, though I had to endure a lot of splash wars and chasing around to get there.

...I also had to endure the fact that I had to actually touch Jack to teach him the correct posture and to help him out during his buoyancy exercises. Odin, I was so glad the water was covering my lower half during \_those\_ moments.

By the end, Jack had progressed so much he actually challenged me to a race. I barely managed to beat him, and thankfully, he relented. Because I was actually getting pretty tired out. How this white haired idiot did all this exercise without tiring out was baffling, but I wasn't going to admit to him that he almost had beaten me; his ego was big as it was already.

Truthfully, it was a fun evening. I didn't know what to expect from a "teach Jack how to swim" hang out, but as always, the whitette came through with his infectious wonder and joy.

...Which is why, as we sat on the rocky shores of the lake, I was having a hard time bringing up the contents of the file I had found on the Final Dead Room. I knew I had to share it with Jack, he had a right to know... but I knew that the moment I brought it up... that would be the moment all the fun we were having was going to end. And I didn't want that. I had gotten all my worries off my mind and I didn't want that to end... I didn't want to face my reality yet. So I kept silent as I sat next to the whitette, admiring the lake's pristine beauty.

Jack, however, picked up on my silence and looked at me with a questioning glance. "Is something wrong, Hic?". I hastily shook my head, but it only made Jack's frown deeper. "...A-are... are you having fun? Or are you..."

As soon as his voice trailed off, I immediately turned to face him. "No! That's not it! I actually am having a lot of fun!", I said as I gestured wildly with my hands, as if I could chase Jack's worries away with them. "It's just... I have a lot in my mind... is all... but! I'm truly having the time of my life! Honest!"

The Ultimate Mystery's frown was replaced by a relieved smile, but much to my chagrin, he immediately began to worry. "And what's on your mind, Hic? Can I help you out? You know you can tell me anything..."

...I... I guess I do trust him like that. But this... I know saying this to him is going to hurt him, so sharing the contents of the file is a big nono... and yet, Jack is waiting for me to answer him. And if I don't, he'll surely be hurt, thinking I don't trust him with my own issues. Chewing on my bottom lip, I decide to tell him about something else, but that is also heavily weighing on my mind.

"Actually... Anna confessed to me today."

I felt Jack stiffen at that... was he surprised about that? No kidding, I too was taken aback. Still, the whitette chuckled and smiled soon after, a teasing smirk dominant on his pale face. "O-Oho? Really?! Who knew Hic was such a lady killer?! Soon enough you'll have all the girls over you!"

An elbow to my sides makes me lose my balance slightly, but I can't help but to feel a bit... disappointed. I guess I was expecting Jack to react differently, to be a little jealous or angry... but that was just me and my wishful thinking. I don't want to be a ladykiller...

\_I just... want you.\_

I'm so deep in my own thoughts, I barely manage to hear Jack's mumbled comment, him staring at the lake intently as he speaks.

"S-so... what did you say to her?"

I sigh, which makes the whitette focus on me expectantly.

"I... turned her down.", I begin to scratch the back of my neck. "It's just... Anna is a nice girl... and I do like her... but only as a friend. You get me?"

At that, Jack hums, a confused look on his face clearly visible. "I see... but then, I don't understand, Hic." He turns to face me fully, his arms crossed over his legs, his chin resting on top of them. "Why are you hung up about it?"

Right. I guess I really didn't explain myself fully. "It's just... I feel pretty bad about it, Jack. I...", I hesitate as I lay down fully on the rocky shore and I bring up my hands to cover my eyes, "I made her cry, Jack. I hate... making people upset. I hate not meeting other's expectations. And it's just... I feel like I just ruined everything."

Jack's confused gaze prompts me to go on.

"Like...", the gesturing is at full force as my hands try to illustrate my point. "I feel like I just ruined a friendship! What if Anna hates me now?! And if Anna does hate me, Elsa will surely hate me too. And bickering among us is the last thing we need in our situation..."

"Also, I feel like I just ruined all my romance options.", I admit, embarrassed, "Like... this had never happened to me, you know?", I ramble on, not waiting for a response from Jack, "No one had been interested in me before, and I mean, why would they?", I gesture to my entire body, "There's no way anyone would be interested in all this. And then I go and dare to be picky about the people who fall in love with me? Someone like me... should just go with the first thing that comes to them... I don't deserve anything else."

"That's not true."

Jack's sudden comment, deep voice full of confidence behind his answer, catches me off-guard. I sit up and his expression is a weird mixture of frustration and seriousness.

"That's not true Hic. You...", a slight blush appears on his cheeks, "You are a pretty great dude. You're smart, you're resourceful, you're funny, hell, I'd even call you cute! Anyone... who doesn't see that... should be declared legally blind!"

...

I'm at a loss for words. I'm so embarrassed by what I'm hearing that I can't form a single coherent thought... except for...

"I-I'm not cute."

"You are, Hic.", Jack affirms, a playful grin on his face.

"Don't tease me!", I say, with a pout, "I'm being serious, Jack!"

"And I am too.", says the whittete, looking stern. "Hiccup, you definitely deserve someone who appreciates all the good qualities you have!", he then chuckles a bit, "and all the bad ones, like that snarky mouth of yours. So... don't be upset, OK? You didn't do anything wrong, I think."

I give him a deadpan glare, but inside, I'm truly grateful for everything Jack is saying. To think that the whittete thinks that much of me... Even if we can only be friends, I thank the Gods for letting me meet this teen.

"And... uh..."

Jack's nervous voice catches my attention, and he's now blushing furiously. What's up with him...? His eyes keep darting from here to there, not looking at me, and he's scratching the back of his neck as he seems to struggle with his words...

"So, what I mean is... God, you deserve someone that appreciates you fully, you know, Hic? And... uh... I...", at this, Jack slaps himself lightly, much to my surprise. "What I'm trying to say is...! Damn it, I have been practicing for this for so long I..."

Jack pauses for breath, and after sighing deeply and closing his eyes, the whittete nods to himself, a small "alright, I can do this" escaping his lips. "What I've been meaning to say, Hic... is... I... I truly appreciate you for who you are and... you deserve someone like that, so...", as he says that, he's looking at me directly, his blue, sapphire-like eyes giving off an intense vibe, his pale face bright as a tomato from all the blushing.

...And then it dawns on me.

Jack... is Jack really...?

No... no way... But then... all the things he said...

All the things he's done... for me...

Is this... really? Is this really happening...?

A laugh escapes from lips, and I can see Jack, who had been looking

at me expectantly, visibly deflate. But I can't help it. I truly cannot. I've been worrying over... nothing for so long. I had resigned myself for a one-sided crush... and now...

I have to stop laughing once Jack gets up to leave. I grab his wrist as strong as I can, and I'm surprised by Jack's strength as he tries to pull away. "W-wait... Jack, hold on a second...!"

"No. You... I understand if you don't like me that way or anything but," the whitette's voice sounds strained as he keeps looking away from me, "but you didn't have to laugh, Hic, damn it! I... this... this is serious for me, OK? I really, REALLY like you and you just went and... laughed all over my feelings and I-"

Jack is close to tears and I suddenly feel terrible. But this is all a mistake. A misunderstanding. And I have to fix it.

I slowly bring my hand to his, and I entwine my fingers with his. They're slender, and slightly calloused, and slightly cold, but its his hand... a firm, steadfast hand. Compared to mine, it's so graceful and different, and yet it feels like it belongs there. My heart is racing as it begins to dawn on me that I'm holding his hand on mine consciously, without any ulterior motives or fake fronts.

I slowly raise my gaze to meet Jack's, who is now looking at me with clear confusion in his face. I gulp to mentally prepare myself. For what I need to say. It's high time... I was honest too. Jack had been honest with me, so it was only fair... for him and for me.

I try my best to smile as I talk, though I'm nervous as Hel, "Jack, you misunderstood me. I-I... wasn't laughing because I didn't like you... but quite the opposite."

Jack makes a confused noise. "Wait, what do yo-"

"Jack.", I say, trying to not sound exasperated, "I... I-I also really like you. More than a friend, I mean." I finish lamely. "I-I've liked you since... since the beginning and, you know... I...", I curse the blush that is no doubt spreading through my cheeks as I speak. "I just couldn't believe it, you know? That you... that someone like you would ever, EVER like me back... That's why I... why I was laughing... I simply COULDN'T believe that someone as worthless as me woul-"

My explanation gets cut short by a spontaneous and tight hug from the whitette. Soon after, my whole body is being rocked by Jack's own as he laughs out loud, a sound filled with pure joy. "You're such an idiot, Hic.", he manages to say between laughter, "I... There's no way I would have fallen for someone worthless. Hic... You... give my whole life meaning. Literally everything I am today is because of you. You... are the most important person in my life right now."

Those words... to say that they make my head light with joy and my heart swell up would be an understatement. I cannot believe yet... that this is happening. All this time, I had been skirting around the issue, making up scenarios in my mind... worst-case scenarios at that. And all along... all along I had been wrong.

And I'm glad I was.

Because right now, as I hug this laughing idiot who is making me laugh with him as well... right now, I feel content. Happy. Because...

Because Jack now... because Jack actually likes me back.

2 PM comes far too soon for my liking, as it forces me back to reality I had gotten off my mind up until that moment. But as me and Jack get dressed, I feel more light than ever. I feel full of hope. Our situation hasn't changed. We're still at the mercy of a demented madman, we're still surrounded by weird mysteries and circumstances and we still don't know what the future holds.

But as I walk towards the new area with Jack's hand entwined on my own, a content smile on his and my own face, I feel... confident. Brave.

Life... is good right now.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>:^)<strong>

\*\*Bet you weren't EXPECTING that.\*\*

\*\*Anywho, nothing to see here move along. Not. I'm honestly so happy to have this chapter out. And plus, I got to write free time for Snotlout! Life is indeed good, Hiccup.\*\*

\*\*As usual, any comments, suggestions or reviews are appreciated. Also, please suggest more characters for the next free time event in the next chapter :o\*\*

\*\*See ya later! Hopefully it won't take too long!\*\*

### 28. 3 - Chapter 3 - Daily Lives C

\*\*Chapter 28 - Despair-Syndrome - Daily Lives C\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Whoo! Back at it again at <strong>

\*\*I sincerely apologize for the delay but man! Oh man, it has been an hectic month for me. What with the new job and Hijack March Madness, I've had less and less time to write this one! I apologize again. Please do be patient with me. I'll work extra hard in order to get these out sooner but as long as March lasts, I can't make any guarantees. Without further ado, enjoy.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I felt like the most luckiest and happiest person in the whole world right now. As I walked towards the new area Monobear had prepared with Hic's hand on my own, I felt truly elated.



He... he had said \_yes\_. To me, \_of all people\_.

Not only that, he admitted to me that he liked me a lot too. Since the very beginning. I was unable to express how happy I felt at hearing those words. And how foolish I felt for ever doubting... for even worrying! All this time, we could have been something... and yet... in my fear, I decided not to act.

But not anymore. As I am experiencing this happiness, this bliss... I refuse to ever lose sight of it. Of Hiccup. Thanks to him, my days are brighter than ever, and I feel like I could run around the camp twenty times and fight an army.

I want to be... this happy forever. And I will do anything to keep it that way. To keep Hic safe.

I squeeze Hic's hand in my own, and I revel at the feeling. Hiccup's skin always looked so soft and delicate, and yet the truth was very different. The little Viking's experience in the forge showed, as his hands were extremely rough and calloused for a kid his age. But it wasn't an unpleasant feeling... I wanted to trace my fingers through the patches of rough skin, to feel the warmth radiating from his palm... I didn't want to miss a single detail from my b...

B-B...

\_boyfriend.\_

It still didn't fully click with me, because it seemed too good to be true. Walking towards the Drill Grounds, I could see Hic was thinking the same. His face had this big, genuine smile and yet he seemed a bit jittery, unsure of how to move or what to do. And I felt the same. So many things I wanted to do or say, and yet nothing concrete formed on my mind, the only predominant emotion in my heart clear.

Happiness.

Which is why I could only smile. Smile despite our despairful situation.

Getting to the Drill Grounds was... complicated.

According to the map, we had to go to the clearing where the Monobear Tower stood, and we would find a pathway to the new area there. As we made our way to the place where that tacky tower stood, an idea formed in my mind.

The tower modeled after the Headmaster and the place where we risked our lives soon came to view, its black and white coloring standing out from the grey bedrock that surrounded the clearing. With curiosity in my mind, I approached the tower with light steps, much to Hiccup's confusion.

I cautiously crept to the door that led to the tower's elevator and started to look closely at it. But no matter how much I searched or stared at it...

"Argh, nothing!"

"Jack... what are you doing?", asked Hic as he walked towards me, a questioning glance clear on his cute freckled face.

"Ah, I was just wondering if we could actually enter the Tower whenever it isn't being used for a Class Trial.", I answered as I looked for a lever, a button, something to open this door, but I was only met by a stainless surface of steel.

"And why would you want to do that?" asked Hic as he too stared at the door.

"Well, I just figured... if Monobear is being controlled by someone, they have to be controlling them from somewhere, right? And it has to be a place where we can't see him.", I explained and Hiccup nodded, urging me to go on. "Well, the only place we aren't allowed to investigate freely is this Tower, so I just thought... you know... maybe the Puppetmaster is here."

Hiccup's eyebrows shot up at that. "You know... maybe you're right Jack.", but then his expression darkened. "Sadly... I doubt Monobear would make it that easy. Seems he locks this place up when there aren't any Class Trials and even then, the elevator doesn't have any buttons to choose a floor or anything."

My mood deflated. "Yeah, I guess you're right. When we go into the elevator, Monobear is the one controlling it. So even if we wanted to search the tower, we can't."

Hic's hand on my shoulder makes my stomach flutter. "Hey, I think it was worth a shot. I bet you're right, Jack. It's just... we can't prove it right now."

Hic was right, and yet it was so frustrating! Our answer to everything HAD to be in this tower and yet we couldn't do anything...! Giving the door a good kick, I began to walk away from the building, Hiccup soon following afterwards. It didn't take long for us to find the new pathway.

Monobear had gone all out, as behind the tower was a set of grandiose staircases built into the granite, leading further into the forest. Right above the stairs was a metallic sign that read "Mr. Monobear's Drill Grounds.", a flexing Monobear standing at the end of the text.

...Yeeep, this seems like the place. Hiccup made a disgusted sound at the sign's tacky military print design and I chuckled as we climbed the stairs that would, no doubt, lead us to another extremely weird and out-of-place facility.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

I was expecting a lot of things whenever I heard the phrase "Drill Grounds".

Aside from the obvious association with power tools and digging, once Monobear had clarified that it referred to a place for exercising, I

had in mind one of those ridiculous obstacle courses I had seen in countless movies that featured military camps.

Once again, the monochromatic bear had exceeded all my expectations, for better or for worse.

In front of me was a ridiculously large building, sporting a rather modern look, what with its chromed walls and huge windows spanning the entire right side of the building. In metallic blue, sleek and slightly slanted letters was the name of the building: Monobuff Gym.

I groaned loudly at the terrible play of words. Seriously... just how old was the one behind Monobear? This was borderline cringe-inducing.

A small beeping sound next to me makes me look, and I see Jack fiddling around with his ElectroID. I ask him what he's doing, noting his incredibly concentrated look on his face.

"Oh, I'm just checking the layout of this place. We don't want any more surprises like... like last case...", he says, trailing off at the end, before returning his attention to the small screen.

I nod at that answer. Jack is right... we should probably get acquainted well with the area or at least we should have a bigger understanding of it. Copying my... b-boyfriend next to me... I grab my own ElectroID from my jean's pocket and bring up the map screen.

Surprisingly, this new area is made up of only one section. According to the map, there's only one building in this whole area, though it is enormous compared to all the buildings we've seen before. This building (the one I assumed was the gym in front of us) was shaped like a pentagon and instantly, memories from the Final Dead Room surfaced. First an Octagon and now a Pentagon... was Monobear alluding to something? Or was he just being random?

"Hic... um, what's a gym?", asks a confused Jack as he sees the building in front of us.

"Uh... it's basically a place where people go to work out and become stronger...", I say as I try to make a sensible explanation. One never realizes how hard it is to define something from our every day lives until you have to actually do so! Thankfully, Jack seems to get the gist of it, but he still looks troubled at the building.

"So, uh, are gyms something that usually can be found in camps?", asked the whittette as we approached the building's double doors. I shook my head in response.

"I'm pretty sure Monobear has no idea of what is actually found in a camp..." I say as I open the door. Inside of the building, the cool breeze of the A/C welcomes us, a long hall stretching in front of us. There's a lot of couches and plants on the walls next to us, and various paintings of the Headmaster doing exercise can be seen hanging proudly on the walls. I resist the urge to take them off... there are still cameras, monitors and guns in this hall and I don't really want to be filled with lead over something this stupid.

Aside from that, the hall has only one door in each wall and one at the very end of it. Curious about the doors on the right, Jack approaches it and takes the handle in his hand. Sadly, the door doesn't budge, no matter how much the whitette shakes and pulls at it. Next to the door, I can see an ElectroID reader, just like the ones we have in our cottages. Walking to it with ElectroID in hand, I bring the device to the reader but...

"Huh... It isn't unlocking.", I say as the card reader remains inert.

"Guess we can't use these then...", says the whitette as he lets the handle go. We have seen a lot of locked doors this time around. Walking away from the doors, we walk down the hallway and try the one at the end. This one opens, thankfully, and we enter the next section in this gym.

We arrive at what it seems to be a reception desk. This room is considerably smaller, and circular in shape. An impressive statue of a woman with long hair, a sailor uniform and an incredibly muscular body is standing behind the reception desk, tall and imposing. On the walls of this room I can see five doors, each with their own card readers as well. But before we can start checking them out...

"Hiccy! Jackie! It's so nice to see you!"

That odious voice came from behind the reception desk, and before long, the Headmaster popped out from behind it, a smile on his plushy face.

"...What do you want?", I say, with as much disdain as possible. I wasn't in the mood for Monobear's shenanigans. But it seems like the Headmaster is very much in the mood, because he approaches us with clumsy steps.

"Why, nice to see you guys again! Your welcome is so warm, I feel like I'm gonna melt!"

"Seriously, the hell do you want? If you're just going to mess around, then piss off.", threatened Jack, but the Headmaster simply stares at us, arms crossed, before a slick grin appears on his snout.

"I see, I see... so it finally happened... I understand... Hee hee... so, who is the top and who's the bottom, huh? Who is the Feudal Lord and the Handmaiden in this relationship? Huh? Huuuh?!"

At that sentence, my cheeks flared up. I was at a loss for words at Monobear's sudden question. T-this wasn't the time for that! Why the Hel did he bring up that right now?!

"Hic... what does he mean by that?", asks Jack, very confused at the Headmaster's words, but I seriously don't want to explain this!

"N-never mind that!", I turn to face the giggling bear with a scowl. "Seriously, why are you here?! S-stop saying nonsense and get to the point, if there's any!"

Monobear grunted, looking disappointed for a minute, before he leapt into the reception desk with a clumsy jump. "Fineeee, I guess we do have to keep this story rated PG-13...", With a flourish of his paw, Monobear brought out something from thin air. It looked familiar... the thin, card-like shape...

"This... is a Gym eHandbook!", said the Headmaster with pride. Looking at the object more closely, it resemble the ElectroIDs greatly, but its a different color; purple.

"What is that for?", asked Jack, thankfully forgetting the previous topic.

"As you walked into this building, I'm sure you saw some locked doors, right?", asked the Headmaster, leading with this easy question. "You probably tried to use your ElectroIDs like the predictable chumps you are, but they didn't work... which is why I came to explain how you're going to access this facility!"

Monobear continued his speech, walking on the desk with a condescending gait. "ElectroIDs are useless in this place! If you wanna remove the locks in these doors and use the installations, you're going to have to \*\*borrow\*\* one of the eHandbooks from this place! Only the eHandbooks can unlock the doors in Monobear's Gym!"

"Wait... borrow?", I asked, interrupting Monobear. "So... we're not keeping these?"

Monobear smirked at me. "Yes, that's correct Hiccy! Y'know, I'm running low in funds right now, so that's why I made only 5 eHandbooks! There's only those 5, so you can't keep them! It would be dreadful if you guys lost them somewhere in the camp, so that's why you can only borrow them as long as you're here."

He says 5... but he's only holding one right now... where are the other 4?

"Hold on.", interrupted Jack, "Wouldn't that be very troublesome for us? I mean, what if more than five us want to use the installations? We'd have to wait until the holder of the eHandbook returns it..."

"Don't worry about that!", said Monobear as he pointed at a clipboard on his feet. "Here's how things will work! Pay attention, because I already explained to everyone else that came before you this same damn thing and I ain't no NPC!"

"Basically, I will lend one of you guys an eHandbook. When I do so, you guys have to sign up in this chart and you have to write down which room you want to use! Anything is fine, as long as it relates to you and can be used to identify you! Then, if anybody else wants to go into that facility, they can go inside as long as they accompany the person with the eHandbook! Any number of people can enter with the eHandbook holder! Also... the eHandbook will only unlock the room you signed up for, so please keep that in mind! So... that should solve all problems, right?"

I see... so if he only has one right now, does that mean he already lent the other four? Still...

"That's too contrived.", I said, not impressed. Seriously, why did he do it like this? Why couldn't he just make enough eHandbooks for us? I seriously don't believe he's running out of funds. Is he doing this to facilitate a murder?

"And its still a little too limited... I mean, what if a 6th person comes after all 5 eHandbooks have been hand down? What would they do, then?", asked Jack, the Headmaster tilting his head, deep in thought at the whitette's query.

"Hmm... I didn't want to reveal this just yet, but since you asked, Jackie...", Monobear once again flourished his paw, and on it, a golden eHandbook appeared. I stopped worrying about how he was pulling out things from thin air... common sense didn't apply to Monobear apparently. The Headmaster stuck out his belly as he spoke with card in hand.

"This is the VIP Pass! As the name implies, it is very important! This pass can unlock any doors in this facility without any limitations! There is only \*\*one of these \*\*in the whole camp, and thus, I'm not giving it away to just anyone. This eHandbook will only be given out until all the other eHandbooks have been handed out! Otherwise, the same process of jotting down your name when you grab it applies."

This... this had to have something to do with Monobear's motive. Otherwise he wouldn't set up this whole thing like so. And yet, the rules had been laid down in front of us; we had to follow them if we wanted to make any process.

I approached the bear cautiously. "So, uh... can you lend it to us? We kinda want to check out all the facilities and all, so we could really use i-"

"Nuh-uh! No way! If you wanna check out all the facilities, then you'll just have to come back here and tell me! I already told you the rules, Hiccy, so follow them!", said Monobear as he stored away the VIP Pass.

Well... it was worth a try. Grumbling, both Jack and I walked over to the clipboard at Monobear's feet and we jotted down our names. It was going to take a lot of return trips, but we just had to check everything out in order to prevent another murder. After we finished checking in, Monobear handed me an eHandbook and with a grin, he disappeared.

I had a bad feeling about this entire thing but... we couldn't just stay here and wait for something to happen...

"So, which door does that one open, Hic?", asked Jack as he gazed at the card in my palms. Squinting at it, I could read "Olympic Pool Room" on its surface.

"The Olympic Pool Room huh...", I muttered as I looked around for the door we needed.

"Over there!", pointed out Jack at the door to our right. "...Or at least, that's what my ElectroID map says."

Looking at Jack's ElectroID, I could see he was right. The map function had been updated to show all facilities. There were five rooms in this gym: the Olympic Pool Room, the Heavylifting Room, the Aerobics Room, the Combat Room and the Obstacle Course Room.

Seeing how our only option was the Olympic Pool Room, we made our way to the indicated door. I gasped a little, however, when Jack grabbed my hand. Looking to the whiteette for an explanation, all I got was a sheepish smile and a blush.

My only answer was a blush of my own. I guess... he's just as nervous as I am about this. But we aren't alone now. We have each other. So facing this... will not be as hard as if we were alone.

\* \* \*

><p>Predictably, the Olympic Pool Room door gave way to a, you guessed, room with an olympic pool on it. That was literally all that was in this huge auditorium like-room. Some bleachers to the side could be seen, along with some lockers on the far end of the room... but the pool itself was in the center of it all, garnering all attention with its clear waters. Jack looked ready to dive in but I had to restrain him a little; we just finished swimming, for Norn's sake!<p>

We weren't the only ones gazing at the pool, either. To my surprise, and disdain, I saw Peter gazing at the still waters with an unfocused gaze before he turned to look at us upon hearing our commotion.

I mentally prepared myself for a confrontation when he started to walk over to us, an unreadable expression in his face. I could sense Jack tensing up as I held his hand, a bit of sweat starting to form as the Ultimate Fear Expert stood in front of us, staring down at us with without saying anything.

After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, finally, Peter spoke up, and the words he said took me by complete surprise:

"I'm deeply sorry."

"Hu- wha?"

"Wh-"

Jack mirrors my own confused expression. Of all the things I expected from the Ultimate Fear Expert... an apology? That certainly came out of nowhere. And yet, as I gaze into those forlorn, unnaturally-yellow eyes of his, I can see he means it. But even though he's being sincere... I can't just forgive him like that.

I cross my arms, letting go of Jack's hands in the process, and I give Peter a stern gaze. "You hurt Jack a lot with your prejudice, Peter. I'm not the one you should be apologizing to.", with a jerk of my head, I signal to Jack, who looks unsure of how to react. The black-haired teen, however, turns solemnly towards the white haired teen and much to my surprise, he kneels down in front of him.

"I truly am sorry that I misjudged you. Truly, I was wrong in believing that you were inferior or anything of the sort. I do realize that what I did was inexcusable, especially of someone like

me but... I do hope that you'll find it your heart... forgiveness for someone that acted so rude towards you."

Jack was taken aback, but he just waved his hand dismissively as he frowned at the Ultimate Fear Expert. "I-It's cool, Pitch, really. Just... just knock that whole humble thing, OK? It's weirding me out... if you do that, I'll forgive you."

Peter rose from his knee slowly, a faint smile on his lips as he stood his full height. "Thank you."

I... I guess if Jack is OK with this, then I'll forgive him as well. He said a lot of things that rubbed me the wrong way, but outside of that, I didn't think Peter was such a bad guy. Still, it would take a while for me to get comfortable around him... not like I was that comfortable around him to begin with. I was still creeped out by his appearance.

"Are you two investigating this place?", Peter asked, out of the blue.

"Yup. Got any leads for us, Pitch?", queried Jack, surprisingly laid-back and comfortable, but the Ultimate Fear Expert merely shook his head.

"Afraid not. I searched around the compound but there was nothing of note. Nothing under the bleachers, and the lockers over there have normal pool supplies. Suffice to say, this is a very normal pool room.", answered Peter, dashing any hopes we had for this place. Oh well, not all of them can be winners...

"Although... I guess there's- there IS something that you two should know.", said Peter as he tried to cover up his slip of tongue. "There is a door behind one of the bleachers here and one near one of the lockers... they are doors similar to the one we used to enter this room."

Huh.

"Where do they lead to?", I ask.

"According to the ElectroID map, one leads to the hallway we used to enter the Reception Desk, and the other leads to the Heavylifting Room.", answers Peter with a bored expression. I confirm that fact with my own ElectroID; its true. I guess that's the next room we'll investigate next, seeing as this one was dry (hah) of any leads.

"Well, if you'll excuse me...", begins Peter as he begins to walk towards the exit, "I've had enough of this room's smell of chlorine. I'll search elsewhere so in the meantime..." a bow, "I bid you two lovebirds adieu."

...

WHY DID HE HAVE TO SAY THAT?!

I MEAN, he's right, true, and we did walk in here holding hands so of course he was going to comment on that and DAMN IT, he had such a teasing grin as he turned away, THOR!



"Well, since there is nothing important to investigate here...", says Jack, completely unfazed by Peter's comment, "I guess going for a swim is A-OK!"

I barely have enough time to register that sentence when I find myself suddenly drenched as Jack dives right into the pool.

Dripping wet, all I can do is sigh as I see the white haired idiot practically showing off his new-found skills. This is going to be a very long day.

\* \* \*

><p>It took far more time than it was needed to get going into the next room, what with me having to get Jack out of the pool and having to walk to the reception desk area to get a re-issued eHandbook for the Heavylifting Room.<p>

Using our new eHandbook, we found ourselves behind the doors of the Heavylifting Room. As expected, the room was outfitted with a lot of lifting equipment. Weights of all sizes and shapes could be seen, along with dumbbells, weight machines and bench-pressing equipment dotted the whole room, one of its walls being outfitted with a room-wide mirror, no doubt to help all those muscle-freaks motivate themselves by allowing them to stare at their bulging muscles.

...No I wasn't bitter about my own lack of biceps shut up

Predictably, the one that was in this room was none other than Snotlout, who was eyeing a barbel with a focused gaze, quite unlike Snotlout's usual demeanor. That focus disappeared once he saw us enter the room. Approaching is with a... smile?... Snotlout actually greeted us. This was starting to weird me out.

"Hey, freak! Fishbone! Isn't this place amazing?!", exclaimed Snotlout as he played around with a 10lb dumbbell in his hand with ridiculous ease.

"I guesssss?", I said, trying to fake interest.

Jack, however, didn't even try to pretend he cared. "Uh, I don't see what's so fun about lifting things and such? I mean, where's the fun in that?"

"It's not about fun.", said Snotlout with a scoff, "It's about pride! In your power and manliness! I mean, seriously, don't you guys get all like proud and stuff whenever your dad says that their son can lift things heavier than most of the adults?! Don't you feel happy about getting all that praise?!", exclaimed the Ultimate Heavy Lifter with a shine on his eyes.

"I... uh, don't remember if I even have a dad...", said Jack with a small voice.

"And, uh, my dad didn't even tell me he was proud of me... ever...", I admitted sheepishly.

Suddenly, we found ourselves in a very uncomfortable silence. Even

Snotlout seemed bothered, as he rubbed his arm with his free hand, unsure of what to say.

And then, all of a sudden.

"Catch!"

Snotlout's sudden yell made me panic as I saw the small dumbbell he was using fly towards me. I catch it, miraculously and clumsily, and so does Jack as Snotlout throws another one at the surprised whitette. As I stare at the burly teen with an obviously confused gaze, he simply rubs his nose with his finger before he starts to leave.

"It's obvious you never got complimented because you can't even lift something heavy without panting, so there. That ought to help ya get started. That way, you'll soon be showered with praise just like me, Snotlout!", and with that loud proclamation, the brown haired teen left the room through the door we just came through, leaving Jack and I with very confused, shared smiles.

"I... guess he was trying to help?", Jack says as he eyes the dumbbell in his hand.

"In his own way, yeah.", I agree... this is definitely very... Snotlout.

Still, it doesn't matter how much muscle I get... my dad will never... see me become more of than a runt. With a sigh, I put the dumbbell back where it belongs and I start to search the room for any clues, because I'm sure Snotlout didn't really search the room thoroughly as he was probably fascinated by all the equipment.

Unfortunately, our search turned up nothing. The only thing that we found was two more doors, one leading to the room next door (the Olympic Pool Room) and the other leading to a neighboring room we hadn't gone to. Seeing how we didn't have any luck with this one, Jack and I returned to the reception desk in order to go to the next room.

\* \* \*

><p>The next room was the Aerobics Room. As I predicted, it was equipped with yoga mats, horizontal bars, rings and the like. A room wide mirror also adorned the far wall of the facility and contrary to the other ones, this room was pretty well lit. The ambiance was kinda ruined by the cardboard cut-out of a Monobear dressed as an aerobics instructor, complete with a ridiculous afro, but aside from that, the room seemed OK. There were two more doors here too, and according to the ElectroID, one of them led to the Heavylifting Room and the other led to a room we hadn't visited yet.<p>

Yes... the same monitors and guns we had expected to see were here as well... nothing out of the ordinary or uncomfortable in this room at all.

Except for the people here.

Tooth was here, and she greeted us with a smile as we entered the

room. But she wasn't alone. Though she had managed to calm herself and she was no longer crying, I could see the redness in Anna's eyes as they widened when she saw us walking in.

Holding hands.

I immediately let go of Jack's hand, much to the whitette's confusion, but I was afraid of any more repercussions. Judging by her expression, though, it was too late. She had seen me walking in, holding hands with Jack. And the extreme hurt in her face vice-gripped my heart.

Jack suddenly grabs my hand with more force than necessary, and when I turn to see his face, I can see his jaw set, his eyes in a focused glare on the girl who is looking at us with confusion and hurt. A girl that isn't alone. Behind her, a very somber-looking Elsa is watching us with a narrowed glare as we make our way towards the girls.

I \_seriously \_DON'T want to be here right now.

Thankfully, Tooth seems to be unaware of the silent conflict between our parties, and greets us with a smile. Trying to keep the conflict a secret from her, I play along. "H-hey there! So... you gals have been checking out this place?"

"Yup!", answers Tooth with an enthusiastic smile. "Sadly... we haven't found anything here... aside from Monobear's offer to teach us yoga, but we declined."

"Indeed, there has been nothing of value in this room.", commented Elsa, sounding boring. "Everything inside this room is completely worthless.", and as she says that I can feel the scathing tone in her voice as her gazes pierces me with such hostility, it hurts.

Yeaaaaaah... I'm definitely not in her good side now. Great. Fantastic.

"I-I see...", I comment as I pull at Jack's hand, trying to steer him away from the two sisters. "W-well, I-I guess we'll... yeah, we'll leave this area to you girls! See ya around!"

I somehow manage to distract the whitette from his staredown enough to force him through the door, but as soon as we're about to clear the door.

"O-Oh! Yeah, sure! See ya around guys! A-and congratulations on your relationship!" comes Tooth's earnest voice and I cringe. This situation can't turn worse now... I don't even care that we didn't even properly investigate that place; I didn't want to die in that room!

As soon as I close the door behind us, quite hastily might I add, an angry Jack let's go of my hand and crosses his arms, a scowl evident on his pale face.

"What the hell happened in there, Hic?", he says in a rushed, angry voice.

I can't help but to feel angry as well. "The same I can ask you, Jack!", I shoot back. "Were you trying to throw down with Elsa or something?! You almost caused a scene because you held my hand!"

Jack's face is incredulous as he hears my outburst. "I held your hand because you're MY boyfriend, Hiccup! And everyone needs to know that! EVEN Anna!"

Yes, he has a point, but, "But that doesn't mean you have to flaunt it in front of her! You're being an insensitive jerk!"

"Oh?! I'm the insensitive jerk?! ", shouts Jack, his voice rising, "How about the one standing in front of me?! How do you think I felt when you let go of my hand just because you didn't want to harm Anna's feelings?!"

I'm at a loss for words when I see Jack's eyes water a little, his gaze dropping. "I... Are you embarrassed of me, Hiccup? Is that it? Are you embarrassed of... us?"

At that, I panic, grabbing Jack's arm and grabbing his right hand. "No, that's not it! It's just-!" I start, trying to get my thoughts in order. "Y-you're right... I shouldn't have to hide our relationship, but I just can't help but to feel guilty about Anna's current state! And then she sees us like this and I just feel like a jerk but-!"

I try to meet Jack's gaze as I speak to him. "I'm not embarrassed about us! Not a bit! Honest to Thor, Jack, I swear!"

At that, Jack lifts his gaze, eyes a bit red, but relief visible in them. "Really...? You mean it?"

I try to give him a reassuring smile. "Of course I mean it. I-I... agonized over this... over us for so long, there's no way I-I'd be embarrassed about us. And, look, I'm sorry for not thinking about your feelings."

The Ultimate Mystery sniffs a little, and then chuckles to himself. "And I'm sorry for making a scene back there. It's just... I just wanted everyone to know that we're together... I might have gone a bit overboard."

"I think we both did.", I say with a sheepish smile.

There are no more words to be said; We have forgiven each other. Our awkward smiles say as much. Well... I'm not looking forward to the consequences of Jack's actions, but what's done is done. And he's right. Eventually, all of them would have found out. So this had to happen if we wanted to go on with our lives.

Besides... having this white haired dork on my side is far more important to me than keeping up appearances.

Having resolved our first... err, relationship quarrel, we move on to the next room, the so called Combat Room.

\* \* \*

><p>As soon as I entered the Combat Room, loud thuds and groans could be hear. One glance at the room was enough to make the source of the noises evident. Unlike the other rooms, this one was poorly lit; it almost resembled a basement, what with the only sources of lighting being some flickering ceiling lamps. And yet, the poor light they provided was enough to see the contents of the room.<p>

Practice dummies, sandbags, wooden swords and many other practice equipment for combat could be seen strewn around the corners of the rooms, a veritable mess surrounding the main attraction of the facility; a boxing ring, perfect for sparring matches.

And one such sparring match was taking place. A rather... one sided match, at that.

As Jack and I made our way to the ringside, we could see a small figure completely obliterating the other, much bigger figure with ease. Though the small figure was wearing a helmet, it did little to contain the mane of red-hair that everyone in this camp could recognize, and the pained groans of the bigger figure were undoubtedly that of Flynn's.

As we neared the ringside, both of us wondering what the hell was going on, we saw the rest of the students we hadn't seen watching the match with peeled eyes; The Twins, hooting loudly as Merida landed punch after punch, Fishlegs apparently keeping a tally of every hit landed and Rapunzel cheering on at the red-haired girl with fervor.

I suddenly felt very bad for Flynn.

"Uh, what's going here?", asked Jack as he winced when an uppercut from the Ultimate Archer floored the brown-haired thief completely.

"Merida was talking about how much she wanted to spar with someone, and then Flynn made a disparaging comment about how "no one would want to beat up a little girl" and then this happened.", said Fishlegs matter-of-factly as he kept writing down stuff on his notepad.

Well, that explains things. Really, I thought Flynn was smarter than this.

With a triumphant grin on her face, Merida takes off her helmet and boxing gloves and gracefully gets off from the ring. "Man, now that was a good ol' warm-up! Who's next?"

I immediately step back. I don't want to awake in a hospital bed. I wonder if Flynn is even OK...?

"You know... next time you could at least let me throw a punch...", groaned Flynn as he got to his feet, staggering and hissing in pain. I'm actually impressed he got up after all that. Merida simply sticks her tongue out.

"In a fight ya gotta strike before your opponent does! There was no way I was gonna let you attack me! I ain't your trainin' dummy!"

Flynn's only response was a groan as he fell on his butt, apparently too sore and bruised to even put any effort on a retort. Thankfully, Rapunzel began treating his wounds with a first-aid kit, a thankful smile on the Ultimate Thief's face.

"Hey, where did you get that?", asked Jack as he looked at the kit in the blonde's hands.

"Oh! I got this from the Freezer!", answered Rapunzel with a smile.

"Uh... and that is?", I asked.

"It's this really cold room we found here when we were investigating.", answered Ruffnut.

"Yeah, there's like... a lot of stuff in there. Food, medicine... and it's all kept frozen and fresh.", added Tuffnut.

"Basically, it's kinda like one of those rooms they use to store meat in meat markets... but with other things inside aside from meat.", said Fishlegs as he looked at us, "It even has this heavy metal door and a lock that can only be opened by one of those eHandbooks."

"And it freezes stuff good! I figure you could turn into a human popsicle if ya stayed in there!", said Merida with an odd amount of enthusiasm.

"It was the only cool thing we found this place, anyway.", said Tuffnut, looking bored.

"Yeah, there was only that and all this fighting stuff. No clues or anything.", finished Ruffnut.

This... was very odd. So far, this place had been extremely normal. Peculiarly so. Given the eHandbooks, I expected this place to be rigged for perfect murder scenarios, and yet... nothing.

"This investigation isn't turning up anything...", I moaned.

"Well, at least we are making sure that no one will get hurt here.", tried Rapunzel with a sheepish smile.

"...Unless you fight that redheaded oni...", mumbled Flynn as he winced when the blonde applied too much pressure on the cotton swab.

With a defeated sigh, I make to leave the room. Really, it's kind of exciting and... great that this place is as safe as a gym can be, but I can't help but to feel suspicious. This place... is too peaceful. What was the trick that Monobear was planning to make us murder each other?

Maybe... maybe the next room will be the one... the one that has the danger... the danger we have to prepare for.

\* \* \*

><p>Of course, nothing goes as planned. Or as I expected.<p>

The last room in this gym, the Obstacle Course, is impressive to say the least. The room's only feature is a giant structure designed to test and hone strength, agility and reflexes. Or so says the billboard near the entrance of such course. Naturally, Jack and I steer clear of it. Wouldn't want to fall in one of Monobear's traps without checking the room first.

So we split to do that. But as I said before, aside from the course itself, the room is entirely devoid of anything. The walls are bare save for the usual monitors and guns and cameras that plague the camp, and there really is nothing of note here at all.

I let out an exasperated groan as our search proved pointless. Betting on one last hope, I called out to Jack. "Find anything?"

"Well... I did find out how "obstacle" is spelled thanks to this sign...", said the whitette with a sheepish smile. I facepalmed at that comment. Gods, this was incredibly pointless.

Was I wrong...? Did this place really have nothing to do with Monobear's motive? But there was no other explanation! I mean, this had to be it, no?! Then why?! Why couldn't we find anything important? Any kind of lead or clue?!

Jack's hug from behind suddenly stopped my mental rant. With an arched eyebrow, I turned my head to stare at the whitette, but Jack simply nuzzled his face on my hair. Man... that felt goo- WAIT, NO, don't get distracted Haddock!

"Um, Jack... what are you doing?"

Jack simply made a humming noise. "You're too stressed Hic. And... I thought this might help." And as he says that, he moves his face to the crook of my neck and honestly? He's doing this in an innocent manner but what he's doing is having the opposite effect on me, judging by the tightening of my jeans: This is not calming me down at all.

"C-can you please stop that?! We're supposed to be on the lookout for traps and stuff h-here... Ah! Cut it out!" I manage to blurt out before he starts to cuddle me once more. Seriously...! We have to focus here!

"No, you cut that out.", admonishes the white haired idiot. "Seriously, Hic. You're making a mountain out of a molehill. I understand that we have to be careful, but you're acting borderline paranoid."

"...Am I that obvious?", I mumble,

"Yup.", confirms the whitette. "So, relax. We checked out this entire place, and though I find that hard to believe, we didn't find a single suspicious thing. There's nothing else to it Hic."

He breathes those last words in my ear, and I manage to disguise my (admittedly embarrassing) moan with a groan. "It's just...! I can't let it go, Jack!"

He chuckles right into my ear and I shiver. "Well, you'll have to. We

did all we could today. And right now? I want to spend some more quality time hugging my adorable boyfriend."

...

Damn the Norn and all the Gods of the Yggdrassil to Ragnarok and beyond.

"...I'm not adorable." I say with a pout. I give up. Maybe Jack is right. Maybe I'm worrying more than needed. We did everything we could... so I guess that's OK... I guess I can unwind a bit...

"Yes, you are.", answers Jack with a chuckle.

...I guess there's nothing wrong with spending time with my boyfriend. In a place like this... time is precious. So I should probably enjoy every last second I have with him.

...Besides, I have to pay him back for teasing me like this, even if it was unintentional.

I grind myself a bit against him and I grin widely as I hear him let out a moan and a shiver, and I have to hold my laughter back when I turn to see his red, embarrassed face. He really is... far more innocent than I expected.

"Call me adorable again, and it'll be worse."

"You're a jerk.", is all he can say as he lets me go with an annoyed face.

These... these are the moments we should treasure.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, let me get this straight- Ouch!", says Flynn as he winces at Rapunzel's treatment, still looking worse from wear after the pummeling Merida gave him. "No one found anything useful at all in that place?"<p>

We're back at the restaurant, the disappointed faces in all of us already answering Flynn's question.

"It really was a waste of time." says Peter, his face only displaying a slightly sad tint to it, "There was nothing of use in that awful place."

"Yeah, tell me about it...", agrees Fishlegs. "I was looking forward for more information about the Tragedy or the world outside, but there was nothing there at all."

"Hey, there were some very cool exercising facilities, though!", said Snotlout, jabbing a finger at the Ultimate Encyclopedia.

"Only muscle-heads like you would get excited over something like that.", sneers Elsa, much to the Twins' amusement.

"But it really is disappointing...", bemoans Rapunzel. "I thought we'd definitely find more about us or the school there! I wanted to learn more about Aster..."



Tooth narrows her eyes at that. "Why would you even want to know more about that scoundrel?"

The Ultimate Painter shifts her eyes nervously as she continues to treat Flynn. "W-well, I was just curious about something Monobear said..."

At that, I am completely lost. "What did Monobear say... about Aster?"

Rapunzel looks at me with a surprised expression. "Huh? Don't you remember Hiccup...? At the Class Trial...?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Ugh! As expected of the <strong>Ultimate Hope<strong>, you just had to go and give this totally cool speech in order to make this less-despair inducing...", said the Headmaster with a disgruntled expression. "We'll see how much you can keep your facade once I give you your deserved \*\*punishment!\*\*"\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I see... now that you mention it... I did find that phrasing odd... wasn't Aster supposed to be the Ultimate Survivalist...? Why would he be called the Ultimate Hope?", said Fishlegs with a pensive face.<p>

"Wasn't that Ultimate Hope dude the one that Hope's Peak Academy experimented on to create? Does that mean Aster was a genius?", asks Merida, her eyes closed as she thinks.

"No, I do not think so.", Peter says. "Remember, the creation of the Ultimate Hope was the defining difference between the Hope's Peak Academy of old and ours; I doubt they would commit the same mistake twice."

"So, uh, what does it mean?", asks Ruffnut to the tall, pale teen.

"I unfortunately do not know. Why was Aster the only one that had two titles? I'm afraid I do not have the answer to that question."

"Great! Another mystery to add to the pile of things we don't know the answer to!", complains Snotlout as he crosses his beefy arms. "Do we even know what Monobear's motive is this time around or what these bracelets do?!"

"Well, they're not flammable so-", begins Tuffnut and Snotlout groans in exasperation.

"Seems like today is going to end on an empty note." declares Tooth with a disappointed sigh. "We'll resume things tomorrow. We'll need to check out the other areas in the camp; maybe we'll find something else that we missed the first time, like those files Fishlegs found."

At that, everyone nods. But just as we are to ready to disperse for

the day-

\*Beep\*

\*Beep\*

\*Beep\*

In the silent room, three soft beeps can be heard, crisp and clear. Before we can even begin to wonder what that noise was, however... it happens. A loud thud next to me catches my attention, and what I see when I turn around to the source of the noise...

...is Jack's crumpled form, laying inert on the floor... limbs all over the place .. his eyes unfocused and a trail of saliva leaking out of his mouth...

Before I know it, I'm next to him, shaking him desperately for a response, anything! And yet... I get nothing. No response, no stimuli. Nothing. On that moment, all I can see is Jack, his unresponsive body in my arms. I can hear two more soft thuds around me, but I don't turn around to see. Because I can't turn my eyes away from the white haired teen in my arms.

As the fear and panic in my heart threatens to pull and drown me into the depths of despair, a faint light in Jack's wrist catches my eye. With a trembling hand, I carefully bring the Ultimate Mystery's arm near me to examine the light. And what I find is...

...The black bracelet, the red, Monobear-eye-like red marking on it shining ominously.

And in that moment... in that despair-ridden moment, I curse myself for letting my guard down. Because Monobear's trap was right in front of me all along.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Whoo! And now I leave you with the dreaded cliffhanger! I hope I don't leave you dangling for long! Well then... until next time guys!<strong>

## 29. 3 - Chapter 3 - Daily Lives D

**\*\*Chapter 3 - Despair-Syndrome - Daily Lives D\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I guess I should come clean for this arc; This is going to be one of the shortest ones of the bunch. I won't toot my own horn, but I do promise the quality will not suffer from the length; this is just a thing that sometimes happens. Unless the quality HAS been falling and I haven't noticed? You guys do know that you can tell me... In any case, enjoy this chapter!<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

When the screaming started, I was snapped out from the numbness that was surrounding my consciousness as I tried to process everything that was happening. Jack had collapsed and hit his head pretty hard... he wasn't responding to anything else... and now that bracelet was shining like a beacon. And there were... two thuds beside Jack and...

And then, I made the connection on why everyone else was screaming.

Managing to tear my gaze away from the white haired teen and the bracelet, I looked around to see who else had collapsed.

It didn't take very long for me to find them.

Crumpled in a hump, and being circled around by a very worried Rapunzel, is the unmistakable wild forest of red hair that is Merida, and next to her are the unresponsive bodies of Ruffnut and Tuffnut, Fishlegs and Tooth trying to get a response out of the Twins.

And just like Jack's, their bracelets have gone off as well, their red light shining intermittently.

"W-What the hell...?! What's wrong with them?!", asks Snotlout in behalf of all of us.

"A-are they dead...?", asks Anna, with fear in her eyes.

At that, I panic. No...! No...! This can't be happening! They aren't-! He's not...!

With a swift motion, I bring my ear to Jack's chest. The mere frantic seconds it takes for me to hear his heart beat seem like forever, but I sigh with relief when I hear it; it's beating way too fast to be normal, but he's alive...!

"N-no... can't be that... they still have a pulse.", confirms Tooth as she holds Ruffnut's wrist to feel for a pulse.

"Then what the hell is going on?", asks Flynn, still looking worse for wear. "And what's up with those bracelets?! Why are they flashing?!"

And as in cue...

"It has begun."

Monobear's solemn voice fills the restaurant as he stands tall in one of the tables, overseeing us all.

"...What has?", asks Elsa of the bear with suspicion written over her face.

"Why, the next motive of course! What, you thought I was lying when I said the bracelets where the next motive? Foolish fools who foolishly think that I wouldn't keep my foolish word.", answers the bear with a holier-than-thou attitude.

"Gaaah! Stop speaking in riddles and tell us what you mean!", demands Snotlout as he frantically looks at the four passed out people in our

group. "What do the bracelets have to do with knocking out these guys?!"

But before Monobear can answer him.

Jack practically leaps to his feet with a grace uncharacteristic from a passed out person. Every person in the room stares at the white haired teen as he continues to stand there without moving or talking, his gaze a bit unfocused. A few seconds of awkward silence pass before I decided to speak up.

"Uh... Jack...? Are you alright?"

At that, the white haired teen turns around, and with a smirk, he answers me. "Of course I am, you cutie-pie. Just seeing you here makes everything \_aaaalright~\_"

...

...

"A-are you sure you're OK?", I ask, taken aback by Jack's answer. Maybe he hit his head harder than I thought...?

A husky laugh, a laugh I've never heard from him, comes out of his lips as he runs a hand through his white hair. "Why, of course I'm fine. Hahaha, well, you are looking fine yourself but you know what I mean, don't you?"

...

This... this is wrong. Jack is confident, sure, and sometimes he's brazen but not intentionally. But this...? He's acting like a complete... flirt! What is going on...?

"Uh... Jack? Are you feeling well?", asks Tooth walking over to us, looking concerned, but the Ultimate Mystery grabs her by the waist all of a sudden and pulls her way more close than what I'm comfortable with, their faces closer than I can tolerate. W-what the hell...?

"Oh, I'm so sorry to worry you, my dear, but I'm quite fine, really! But if you think I'm unwell... you can always make me better with a private, hmm hmm, session."

Tooth, thankfully pushes Jack away from her, looking extremely uncomfortable. She then stares at her hand with shock clear on her face, before exclaiming. "Jack, you're hot!"

"Oh, I knew th-"

"No! You're boiling! Your temperature is beyond normal!", interrupts Tooth, thankfully killing Jack's pick up line before he can finish it. At that, I walk up to the white haired teen, ignoring his "Oh, can you touch me like that later too" comment as I bring my hand to his temple.

It's true. His skin is hot to the touch. Does he... have a fever?

I turn to face Monobear, who's looking smugly at the scene unfolding

in front of us. "What the hell is going on here?!"

At that, the Headmaster smirks.

"Why, it's the next motive as I told you before! It's the  
\*\*Despair-Syndrome\*\*!"

...What? Wait a second... wasn't the Despair-Syndrome  
that...?

"Despair-Syndrome... isn't that the illness that Tadashi guy  
mentioned in his report?", asked Snotlout as he took an exaggerated  
step back from Jack.

"Indeed it is...", said Peter as he trailed off, before zeroing his  
glare on Monobear. "Explain yourself. What is the meaning of  
this?"

And at that moment, the Twins stood up, much like Jack did, their  
eyes possessing the same unfocused quality. With a wariness to his  
motions, Fishlegs brings his hand to Ruffnut's forehead before  
yanking it away with a yelp. "Ruffnut is burning up!"

At that, the lanky blonde's eyes widen in horror, before she starts  
screaming. "Oh crap! Oh... crap! I'm on fire! I-I'M ON FIRE!  
S-SOMEONE HELP ME...!"

"Cool... invisible fire... I've never seen people being burned by  
invisible fire before!", is all Tuffnut can comment with fascination  
on his face. Upon hearing his comment, Ruffnut calms down, her  
previous fear gone and now replaced by wonder in her eyes.

"You're right...! I can't believe I'm being burned by invisible fire!  
Man, this is the coolest!"

"Uh... you're not really burning... it was just a figure of speech.",  
interjects Fishlegs as he tries to explain, but the twins are on him  
before he can continue.

"Oh? And what is this figure of speech you speak of?", ask  
Tuffnut.

"Is it a circle? A triangle? A rhododendron?! Tell us, my geometry  
isn't very good!", rambles Ruffnut.

"That last one isn't even a plant...", corrected Elsa.

...

This... sure, the Twins aren't the brightest duo in our group, but  
this is ridiculous. They're taking things way too literal! And they  
also have a fever... Is this related to the Despair-Syndrome...?

I manage to tear my gaze away from a scared looking Fishlegs who is  
trying his best to explain things to the Twins when I hear Rapunzel  
gasp. I see Merida standing up, and though her red hair is covering  
her face, I can guess she possesses the same unfocused gaze the other  
three had. So, does this mean she also has...?

Sniffing preludes sobbing as the redhead begins full out wailing

openly, big tears streaming down her round, freckled face. I can't believe my eyes... Merida, crying like this?!

"People... catching fire...! I-It's too scary...!", is what I can gather from Merida's sob-ridden speech. She's crying... over this...?

"Oh, Merida... it's OK! No one is on fire, nor they will catch fire!", says Rapunzel, trying to calm down the red-head. "Everything is going to be oookay! Nothing bad will happen!"

Unfortunately, it has the opposite effect, as Merida starts to wail once more, reaching an impressive pitch of voice I never expected to hear from the Ultimate Archer.

"N-nothing will h-happen...? T-things staying a-as is f-f-forever is... too scary! I-it's terrifyin'!"

Rapunzel's expression mirrors our own as we see our four friends acting in such odd manners. What was going?! Trying to obtain answers, I face Monobear again, this time resolute.

"Alright. Fess up. What... did you do to them?!", I ask, using my most commanding voice. Monobear, as expected, simply snickers in my presence before speaking.

"How many times do I have to tell you? This is the third motive! We're going to have an exciting time when a murder occurs under the effects of Despair-Syndrome!"

"But I thought you said the third motive was the bracelets!", shouts Flynn. Monobear wags his finger at him disapprovingly.

"I did, and it is! Both the bracelets AND the Despair-Syndrome, that marvelous sickness 'Dashi spoke of in his report, are the third motive!"

So... he knew about the file... Does this mean he wanted us to find out about that information, just like the newspaper clip he gave me at the Final Dead Room? But what for? What is his plan?

Seeing our confusion, the Headmaster continues his exposition.

"Allow me to explain!"

"This state-of-the-art bracelet I put on you guys while you slept has a nice little secret to it. You see... on the inside of these bracelets are some retractable needles! And what do those needles do, you ask?", pauses the Headmaster as he asks that leading question, a question whose answer I'm dreading. "Why, these needles will inject you bozos with a nice, healthy dose of Despair-Syndrome!"

A cold, void-like silence envelops us as his words reach our ears. I couldn't help but to stare at my bracelet with fear.

"Here's how this will work!", continues the Headmaster, no doubt enjoying our shared shock, "At random intervals of time which I will not disclose, these bracelets' needles will pop out and inject you guys with the disease! This will continue to happen until someone

kills! But don't worry... the bracelets will inject the infected with the cure once a killing happens, and then they will harmlessly pop off from everyone!"

"Other than that, there's no way to remove the bracelets. Well... they will also drop off if your heart stops... but really, who would kill themselves to get rid of it when you can do it as easily by offing someone else? Puhuhuhu..."

Your heart stops... the bracelet pops off. Or you kill someone and it also falls off... Those are the options Monobear is giving us. But... do we really HAVE to kill someone? I... refuse to believe that! There must be... some other way to remove them. Monobear continues his rambling without paying any attention to us.

"Oh... I guess I should mention that if you try to force off your bracelet... it will go BOOM-BOOM and you will go bye-bye... Nyahahahaha!"

A cold drop of sweat ran through my back as I processed our situation. Once again, we were presented with an ultimatum. Though it seemed less severe than being starved to death... this was the Despair-Syndrome... an illness that had put the Future Foundation on the defensive.

"What happens if no one kills anybody?", asks Peter, his eyes narrowed.

"Well, then I guess you will all be infected!", says Monobear with a sheepish grin.

"S-So... the reason everyone is acting up... is it because of this Despair-Syndrome?", asked Fishlegs nervously as he looked at Jack, who was still trying to hook up with Tooth, much to my annoyance and anger.

"Yup! Despair-Syndrome manifests differently on each person it affects. Jackie got the Flirty Disease, The Nuts got the Gullible Disease, and MerMer got the Crybaby Disease!", answered Monobear with gusto.

"Really... you guys were getting all chummy and comfortable with each other, so a motive where everyone's personalities get switched around is sure to make this more exciting! I can't wait for the Blackened's scheme this time around!", shouted the bear with a joviality that was cringe-inducing.

And then, that joviality disappeared as the bear sighed dejectedly.

"... Do you ever feel like you're just repeating your past exploits...?", mumbled the Headmaster to no one.

I wanted to shout at him that there wasn't going to be any Blackened, but I wasn't sure this time... If everyone got infected and started to act up differently than normal, then there was no guarantee that we wouldn't kill anyone; especially if we did so under the influence of this personality-changing sickness.

Once again, the Headmaster had put a timer on our situation. Should

we kill early in order to prevent a mass outbreak in the camp? Or should we wait until the end? No... What am I thinking? We need... to find another way! Maybe there's something the Headmaster overlooked this time...

"Well, I'll leave you guys with these nutcases! Happy killing, everybody!", and with that tasteless remark, the bear left, looking all too pleased with the chaos he caused.

A chaos... that seemed unnaturally zany for the bear.

"Nutcases...?", repeated Tuffnut with a hazy look in his face.

"Does that mean we're full of nuts?", asked Ruffnut, looking excited all of a sudden.

"U-Uhhhhh... I don't w-want to be filled with nuts...! I'm allergic to 'em...!", sniffled Merida before breaking into another fit of crying.

"All I know is that everyone is nuts for me... but then again, I already knew that.", said Jack to everyone with a chuckle.

...

It really seemed... goofy, this whole motive.

"Are we supposed to kill someone over this?", asked Flynn, mirroring my skepticism. Don't get me wrong, I didn't like the fact that Jack was sick, but it was kinda hard to take this seriously when you saw the chaos in front of us.

"We shouldn't take this lightly.", commented Tooth, looking stern. "I mean, disregarding the abnormal symptoms, an untreated fever is dangerous."

"Plus, these guys could really hurt themselves! They don't seem to grasp the severity of their situation.", added Rapunzel as she looked at the afflicted with worry.

And it was true. It seemed like Jack and the others were following a strict set of rules for their personality disorders. Rules that ruled out any kind of common sense in order to meet them; especially in the case of Merida and the Twins.

"I agree with Ms. Solaris.", spoke up Elsa as she looked at the sick, "We should not let our guard down. This is a motive that is threatening our minds; There is no guarantee these silly symptoms won't transform into something worse as the Despair-Syndrome worsens."

"P-plus! W-what if the sickness spreads to all of us?!", exclaimed Fishlegs as he fiddled with his hands. "If all of us get sick, then the situation will no longer be under our control! We'd be basically acting under the influence of a virus! W-who knows what could happen to us then?!"

"S-So...", I began, trying to consider our options. "Should we quarantine them...? That's what people usually do in these



cases..."

"Yeah!", shouted Snotlout, far more enthusiastically than the situation merited. "Let's lock them up somewhere where they can't get us sick or something! That Despair-Syndrome is that fucking sickness that is wrecking the outside world, right?! I don't wanna be near any of them, I might catch it!"

"...You do know that you're going to catch it eventually if no mutual killing happens, don't you...", mumbled Elsa under her breath.

"I-in any case..." began Rapunzel. "W-where should we quarantine them...?"

"How about the hospital in the Rec Area?", suggested Peter. "We weren't allowed there before on the account that... err, Toothless was being treated by Monobear, but now that there's no one hospitalized there, it should be fine for us to use it."

I ignored the throbbing ache in my chest at the mention of my friend's name and nodded at the dark haired-teen. "Y-yeah... I agree. That's the best bet we have. It's a hospital, so hopefully, there'll be stuff there so we can treat this."

Yeah... Even if this sickness doesn't seem that threatening, Monobear undoubtedly is plotting something far more sinister. There's no way this is just a childish prank. If he's manipulating our personalities with this illness, and he established a grim condition to cure it... then he's being serious.

And we must be serious too. Which is why we can't give in right now. We must find a way to thwart Monobear's trap.

I take Jack's hand and though he smiles at me with a pleasant smile, I can tell he's not really smiling sincerely. That glazed look over his eyes prevent him from seeing reality. And that's why his smile hurts me a little.

We were finally together... we were able to fully express our feelings to each other at last... and now we were being forced to act insincerely again.

Gripping Jack's feverish hand (I was alarmed by how unnaturally warm it had become), I pulled him outside of the restaurant and towards the hospital across the Rec Area, the others following suit.

\* \* \*

><p>I was expecting something eccentric out of a hospital named "Dr. Killgood", but to my surprise, the inside was pretty much a by-the-book hospital, down to the latest white, immaculate tile and industrial lighting. Really, the lobby was so ordinary, complete with a cheap wood desk and guest chairs lined up along the wall, that it seemed like Monobear had done so deliberately as sort of a passive-aggressive gesture against us for expecting something weird.<p>

"H-hopefully, we'll find out something about the Despair-Syndrome here...", said Fishlegs as we walked down a hall that apparently led to the patient's rooms, if the sign by the entrance was to be

believed.

"Yeah, we don't actually know that much about the disease... We just know its bad and that it provides some weird symptoms, but what IS IT exactly...?", added Tooth. "We need to know what we're against."

"Maybe we'll even find a way to cure it!", chipped in Rapunzel, sounding hopeful as she tried to console Merida once again, who had started to cry about something I hadn't paid attention to.

"I'll look for anything as long as I don't have to interact with them". said Snotlout as he made a grossed out face at Jack, who was now trying to hit on Flynn, much to the Ultimate Thief's distaste.

"Then I guess we will split up and search the hospital for clues, then?", asked Elsa.

"As soon as we set these guys up, yes.", answered Tooth, taking charge of the situation.

It didn't take us very long to find empty rooms in this place, what with us being the only residents in the camp. Tooth and Rapunzel did most of the setting up for the patients, as not many of us had experience with medical equipment and procedures. The fact that the Ultimate Dentist had some basic medical knowledge didn't surprise me, but Rapunzel's acute knowledge of medical procedures did. When questioned about it, the blonde nervously got a strand of blonde hair that had fallen over her face before answering.

"I... I actually have read a lot about it, yeah. That's why I know so much about it!"

...Somehow, I found that hard to believe. The way she performed all the procedures was too practiced for someone who had never had any medical training. But I didn't press her for answers; right now, getting Jack and the rest of them settled down is all I really care about.

At one point, both girls kicked us all out from the rooms without an explanation, but we didn't have to wait too long to find out why. As we stepped back into the rooms, one by one, we found the patients already in hospital gowns, resting peacefully on their beds. Well... Jack was still flinging out flippant pick-up lines at anyone who got close, the Twins were still taking everything at face value (much to Peter's and Fishleg's annoyance) and Merida couldn't stop crying for a full minute, but at least... they were in their beds.

Tooth and Rapunzel let out a deep breath as they closed the doors to the patient's rooms, meeting us outside in the hallway.

"Well, that should do for now...", said Rapunzel in a low voice.

"We found some pills to treat the fever, but that's all we can do for now... without knowing anything about the illness, we can't give them proper treatment.", lamented Tooth as she bit her thumb's fingernail.

"W-well, at least they are a little better now, right?", I asked,

unable to reduce my worrying over that white-haired idiot.

"Fat good it will do us, if they don't have any fever.", whined Snotlout. "We need to find a way to fucking cure it!"

"Then, should we get our search started?", asked Peter, ignoring Snotlout's outburst. "Perhaps this medical facility will have a clue about the illness, and how to treat it."

"Yeah, I'm down for that.", said Flynn nonchalantly.

There was no doubt we had to explore this place, it was important. But I...

"I'll... stay here with the sick and help out Tooth and Rapunzel.", I said, instantly regretting it as everyone's eyes landed on me.

"Sure, fine with me.", and at that moment, I was grateful for the Ultimate Thief's lax nature. Enduring the stares of Anna and Elsa became a wee bit easier and since Snotlout didn't particularly care for what I did and Peter seemed to just agree with whatever I said, I was able to stay back.

I had to believe they would find something, anything... but for now.

"I'll... take care of Jack's room, if that's OK.", I said to the Ultimate Dentist and the Ultimate Painter, who shared a knowing smile between them before agreeing. Gods... were I and Jack really \_that\_ \_obvious? This bothersome blush will be my ever-present companion, it seems...

I excused myself from the two grinning girls and I entered Jack's room. It was probably because the rooms themselves hadn't been used at all, but they were completely immaculate, the medicine in the shelve by the curtained window still neatly organized. The usual monitor, security camera and gun was mounted above the room's entrance and on the right corner near the door was a turned off TV. And on the opposite side of the shelf... was a hospital bed, where Jack was sleeping peacefully.

I approached the white haired teen slowly, worried about the fact that I was going to disturb his sleep. Thankfully, he didn't even stir as I pulled up a stool next to the whitette's bed. He really looked so peaceful as he slept, totally at odds from how he was acting when he was awake.

I nervously brought my hand to his forehead. The fever was still there, but at least he wasn't scorching hot like he was before. Jack smiled contently as I brought my hand to him, no doubt enjoying the coolness of my touch. But I didn't want to wake him up, so I retracted my hand; he really needed to rest. This was the only way to stave off the effects of the Despair-Syndrome that we knew about and I didn't want to hamper Jack's recovery.

...

As I stared at his face, worrying thoughts wander through my mind. This Despair-Syndrome doesn't seem like a big deal, but... this is

Monobear we're talking about. He wouldn't do something silly without a goal. What if... what if this sickness is something life-threatening to them... to us? Would that be motive enough for someone to kill...?

...if it meant saving Jack's life, would I kill for Monobear to apply the cure...?

No, thinking like that... that's what the demented bear wants. Besides, even if I somehow managed to gather the courage to kill someone for the cure... It would only hurt Jack in the end, because of the rules of this camp: Whoever kills someone is the only one that can leave unless you fool the others... and if you fool the others... then only you can leave and the others are left to die. I wouldn't be able to do that to any of the guys, much less Jack. And the other option? Letting the others survive in my place?

...I had considered that fact that my life would be of better use for them... if I could somehow cure them by letting myself be found out as the culprit, they wouldn't have to suffer from this motive. But...

...But I could never kill someone. And... I'm sure Jack wouldn't forgive me if I did that...

So I dismissed those stupid thoughts of mine. There was no need to be so rash and hasty. We just had to search for an alternate way. Mutual killing was never the answer.

So in order to keep myself thinking those negative thoughts, I decided to instead think of the possibilities I had in front of me, in the shape of this white haired idiot. I had to keep my hopes up... and believe in the future I had with Jack. Too many things had been taken from me and it would be a foolish to ruin that future myself.

\* \* \*

><p>Roughly an hour passed before an IM reached my ElectroID, asking for my presence in the hospital's lobby. With a bit of hesitation, I left Jack's room and I made my way towards the specified area, accompanied by Rapunzel and Tooth. As we arrived there, however, I felt my hopeful mood deflate. Judging by their expressions, the others either found nothing at all... or something bad.<p>

Seeing that every single person within our group that was able to move was here, Tooth cleared her throat and stepped forward right in the middle of us. "So... did you guys find anything?"

"W-well... I didn't actually find anything...", began Fishlegs, "But I did manage to figure out the layout of this place, so I'm going to tell you guys about that first, so you can follow our findings more easily. Sounds good?"

At that, Rapunzel, Tooth and I nodded. Fishlegs cleared his throat before he began talking.

"This hospital is actually, uh, rather small. It only has one floor, and it's basically comprised of this lobby, a single hallway that goes around in a square shape, and the rooms for patients, medical

staff, and storage. So...", he pointed at the general direction from where we came from, where the others' rooms were. "If you go down that hallway and keep going, you'll eventually loop back here."

"There are no fire or emergency exits, and the windows are all closed with metal plates like the ones in that room we all awoke in before coming to this camp...", added Anna without looking at me.

"Isn't that kind of design kind of a fire hazard...", commented Rapunzel, "How did Monobear even get this place approved?"

"Ugh! Who cares?!", shouted Snotlout, "We don't have time to waste on trivial shit like this! Does anyone have any info on this stupid illness and how to counteract it?!"

To my surprise, it was Flynn who stepped forward. The Ultimate Thief, however, looked oddly grave. I found that weird, as the brown-haired teen was usually one to show off whenever they did something noteworthy. And yet...

"...I found something alright. I found this in the medical records a few doors away from here", began Flynn as he pulled out a green folder with the Future Foundation logo stamped on its cover. "And it ain't pretty, guys."

The atmosphere turned tense as the Ultimate Thief cleared his throat to read the file.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>"A Complete Study on the Despair-Syndrome Virus  
<strong>\_\_by Future Foundation Auxiliary Member #035 -  
Baymax."\_\_

\_"As I have been instructed to keep this report in an accessible language and to be sparse in 'mind-numbing medical terms' by my co-workers, I will try to be concise on the information I have recollected from numerous patients afflicted by this newfound disease."\_\_

\_"The Despair-Syndrome is a man-made virus created by the once-thought-defunct Ultimate Despair organization. We have determined it to be artificial due to no links to any of the known viral taxonomic structures and due to evidence found in the virus' genetical make-up that shows signs of manipulation."  
\_"

\_"Despair-Syndrome enters its victims through injection, and on initial stages is non-contagious aside from the mentioned method. However, the virus develops quickly and in the latter stages, it can spread to adjacent people through coughing and sneezing."\_\_

\_"The virus' symptoms manifest differently in every patient, and its effects are of the neurological type. The affected will display an abnormal rise in temperature, bouts of tiredness and unconsciousness, and changes in their personality and behavior due to the virus' attack on the victim's brain. It appears that the personality change is usually related to a victim's buried insecurities, fears, or memories. The disease also hampers rational thought and use of logic

in all documented patients."\_

\_"Despair-Syndrome has been shown to be easily treated on its earlier stages, and can be cured with no difficulties with normal anti-viral treatments. However, due to the fast-evolving nature of the virus, once it reaches its maturation state (which can take from 2 hours to 6 at most), no anti-viral will be able to counteract it fast enough to stop its spread through the victim's body, as it is highly mutative. Not only that, it has been learned from the cured patients that the personality changes done by the virus itself are permanent, as the damage to the brain done by the illness is too great to feasibly recover."\_

\_"All documented cases of untreated Despair-Syndrome are invariably fatal. If the infected don't die from an accident due to their hampered common sense and rational thought, the virus will finish off the patient itself. Once the disease has reached its final stages, the initial symptoms will intensify and the personality change will inevitably transform into a complete lack of drive and will to survive similar to those present in patients with depression, but in a more potent and concentrated manner. The infected with the Despair-Syndrome will quite literally lose the will to live, refusing food and drink at first and as the disease culminates, sleep and even air. Those that manage to survive past that will succumb to heart and brain failure, as they will literally despair at life itself, hence the name of the illness."\_

\_"That is all that we could gather as of now. Finishing my report for Future Foundation Headquarters, this is Future Foundation Auxiliary Member #035 - Baymax."\_

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...

As Flynn finished reading that, I felt devoid of any hope. That last glimmer I had dared to nurture as I watched Jack sleep quietly had been crushed to dust by the truth found within this report; Jack... and everyone who was infected... was invariably going to die. And if we didn't do what Monobear wanted... then us... we were at risk too.

I could see it in everyone else's eyes as well. They were afraid, not only for the safety of our friends, but theirs. I immediately cursed the Headmaster under my breath; no doubt he had planned for this file to be found; he wanted to crush all our hopes like this and to push us towards despair. This... had been a trap.

A cough made me snap out of that depressing train of thought and when I saw who had called for our attention, I found myself staring at a very uncomfortable Snotlout.

"Err... I know right now is not the best time to be all positive and shit, but uh... hear me out..."

I found myself arching an eyebrow at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's behavior. What did he even mean... by that? How could anyone be positive... in a situation like this? And how could Snotlout, of all

people be positive? I'd figured he'd be freaking out with this information.

Seeing how we were judging him for even daring to suggest positive thinking in this situation, Snotlout humphed at us before taking out a beaten up journal from his pocket, no doubt being even more bent out of shape due to how roughly Snotlout had stored it.

"Really, you idiots are always babbling about how we shouldn't give up hope or something whenever Monobear does anything, and yet you're giving up without hearing what I, Snotlout, have found?!"

He... had a point. We were dead set on being against Monobear... but a motive like this? Could we really be more positive...?

Peter scoffed. "As if anything you found could even be good news."

"Prepare to be eat those words, you creep!", answered Snotlout as he flipped the small journal with a dramatic movement of his hand. "For this info I found in the hospital director's room is gonna blow your socks off!"

I didn't dare to hope this time. I didn't have anything against the Ultimate Heavy Lifter aside from, well... the fact that he had been a jerk to me from the very beginning and though he was cleaning his act up lately, I... still didn't think of him as someone reliable yet... but no one bothered to stop Snotlout from his reading. We didn't have anything to lose, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>"<em>From the Diary of Hiro Hamada:"<em>

\_"Honestly, I don't even know why I even bother to keep this around anymore. No, wait, I do know why I keep this. It's just like Tadashi says, keeping a diary is a very good way to relieve stress. And boy do I need that."\_

\_"Right, so... uh, dear diary...? Society is collapsing fast. Yeah, yeah, it sounds dramatic but its true. Those Ultimate Despair jerks we thought had been done for have begun their plot and it ain't pretty. Honestly, what are we even supposed to do against [smudged out text]?! I guess we can leave the armed forces of the Future Foundation that one threat."\_

\_"But that thing is not what worries me. What worries me is the after-effects of its attacks. Director Manny says there's nothing to worry about, and that Hope's Peak Academy and San Fransokyo will be safe, but I'm having my own doubts. I mean, how can the Director see the Despair-Syndrome's effects and NOT be worried? I thought he was smart... well, not smarter than me, but you know what I mean."\_

\_"Tadashi is working his butt off in a way to reverse the brain damage done by the disease, the Hope Restoration Program or something. I really want to help him with that, but he says its too dangerous or something. It's real lucky that we have the Ultimate Cure among our student body, or else this pandemic would literally take over the world in less than a day or two."\_

\_"In any case, aside from that impending sense of doom that is hanging over our heads as we watch city after city fall to the disease's grasp, I'm doing OK. I still can't believe the school is giving out homework during this crisis, but that is another grievance for another day."\_

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...

Snotlout finished his reading with a smug smirk. "Aaaand?! What do you think of THAT?! Are you guys ready to bow to the greatness of Snotlout and the hope he brought with this info?"

I... didn't know how to feel honestly.

"So... what that diary is saying is... there is a cure for the disease?", I said, carefully choosing my words.

"And I though you were the smart one, fishbone.", retorted Snotlout, looking even more smug than before. "Didn't you hear me? That's what this Hiro says!"

"Who is this Hiro guy anyway?", asks Anna to the burly teen, who stutters a little before answering.

"How should I know?! B-but he has the same surname as that Tadashi guy, right?"

"So that information must be legit.", mumbles Elsa as she brings a finger to her chin. "If they are related, it's likely they're both from the Future Foundation."

Now that she mentions it... I do recall reading his name in that file from the Final Dead Room. So this isn't a fake person created by Monobear...

Still... that wasn't addressing my main point...

"That's good and all, Snotlout but... uh... we sort of already know there is a cure for the disease.", I say, hoping to get my point across.

And, judging from the confused look on his face, I gather he did not get what I was getting at.

"So? I fail to see any problem with that I just said."

Peter groans as he brings a hand to his temple. "What Hiccup is trying to say, you simple-minded fool, is that we already knew of the existence of this cure. After all, our bracelets are supposed to cure the disease in the event Mutual Killing happens. How else was Monobear supposed to honor his promise otherwise?"

As he processes the words said by the Ultimate Fear Expert, Snotlout turns uncharacteristically scarlet before grunting and crossing his arms. "I-I knew that already... I was just testing you



idiots..."

Rapunzel mercifully interjects with a nervous laugh. "A-anyways...! We still got a lot of information about this disease... so we should be able to treat the guys better, right Tooth?"

The Ultimate Dentists' grimace tells otherwise, but she still nods her head at the blonde with a shaky smile. "Well, there isn't much we can't do against this type of virus, but there should be some kind of medicine that can help them keep stable..."

"But with no way to cure them, that is just a way to stall for time...", said Elsa, sounding a bit nervous.

"Then I guess we should search for the cure, right?", said Flynn, looking more confident. "I dunno about you guys, but I'd rather believe there is a way out of this than sit down and wait for death to come."

"Is there even a cure, though?", asked Anna, biting her nails. "I mean, sure, Monobear has it, but what if he has it all...?"

"And... what if he hasn't?" countered Peter, "We won't know until we try, and it is as Mr. Rider says: We should at least search for the cure. If what the file is saying is to be believed, then the cure must come from a student... this "Ultimate Cure." And if Monobear is able to administer the remedy to the Despair-Syndrome with ease, then he either has the student hidden somewhere, or he had a stash of the concoction some place in this camp."

What Peter was saying made sense... and it was honestly our only shot right now. The other options were unsavory; killing or wait for the disease to do us off. The info we had just heard was soul-crushing... but I refused to give up now. Somehow, Peter's words had given me enough motivation to go on. And... I didn't want Jack to die. Nor did I want to go out in such a horrible way. So... even though the odds were heavily against all of us...

We all nodded towards the Ultimate Fear Expert's words. Because in this despairful situation, we had to cling to anything, any small bit of hope.

"So, we'll start searching the camp tomorrow.", I said as I looked at my ElectroID's clock, which was displaying a 6:39 PM, no doubt the sun outside already setting down, darkening any possibilities of finding anything in the twilight. No objections were made at my words.

"We'll leave that to you guys.", said Tooth, looking towards the doors of those infected by the disease. "I'm going to stay here and treat Merida and the others, perhaps I can buy more time for us this way..."

"And I'll help her!", shouted Rapunzel enthusiastically before clamping her mouth shut with her hands, suddenly remembering we had to be quiet at a hospital. "Tooth can't do this by herself, but relax! We'll keep these guys safe and healthy while you get some rest!"

"Are you sure you'll be OK?", asked Flynn, looking worried. "I can

help you girls if you want..."

Rapunzel bit her lip before looking towards Tooth, who merely gazed at Flynn before asking. "I guess... but do you even have any medical training?"

The Ultimate Thief hesitated before answering. "N-no... but! I wanna help you girls! In any way I can."

I too, wanted to stay by Jack's side by helping the two girls, but before I could do say anything.

"ROOOOAR! Absolutely not!"

Monobear's sudden appearance made Fishlegs screech, and it made Flynn lose his balance as the bear had decided to appear right in front of our faces. He was positively fuming as he wildly shook his stuffed arms at us.

"The only people who can stay overnight at the hospital are the patients and those DIRECTLY involved in the medical procedures! No assistants or nurses are allowed here, and you two ARE CERTAINLY NOT allowed to stay here!", shouted Monobear, his arm flailing intensifying even more.

"Unless you wanna taste lead, I suggest you guys skedaddle to your dorms! Unless you plan to murder, I won't allow overnight stays!", without notice, Monobear had brought out a machine gun from behind his back, the bear caressing the deadly object with a glint in his eye. "I've been itching to use this baby on rule-breakers... so don't test me...!"

That was all it took for us to run out of the hospital, shamelessly. I would apologize to the girls later, but as it turns out I'm highly allergic to machine guns. With our plan already slated for tomorrow anyway, you can't blame me for acting like I did, right? So once we were safely away from the hospital, we disbanded for the day and we returned to our cottages.

\* \* \*

><p>I wish I could say I was getting a good night's rest, but that'd be far from the truth. My mind was swirling with worries and questions with no answers. How had Monobear gotten ahold of both the disease and the cure? Did that mean that he was really being controlled by Ultimate Despair, despite the fact that they had been defeated? If so, how? And on the subject of the cure... the Future Foundation and Hope's Peak Academy apparently had it, so how come Monobear has it now? And... if the cure existed, then why did the disease not disappear? What does all that mean? Just... what is going on the outside world?<p>

And... remembering that file I got from the Final Dead Room... the newspaper clipping mentioned that people shouldn't get out of the shelters without gas masks... does that mean that there really is a pandemic on the outside? Riots? If so... is getting out really that important? After learning this, should we really even bother with escaping?

Maybe... that's why Monobear decided for a motive like this. Before,

he had tempted us with our missing memories and our families' fate because we didn't know the state of the world outside and we yearned to return to that world. But now that we found more info about our situation... Monobear must have changed his modus operandi. But why did he do it? Why would he willingly give us information that destroys our interest in getting out, and instead literally forcing us to kill each other?

He had gone completely against his initial words... about how he wouldn't force our hand. Why? What was he plotting for us...? If he went against his word, could I really trust him to hold his end of the bargain this time around? Would he... would he really cure Jack and the others? Was I willing to believe in that bear... would I really trust the one who had taken Toothless from me, and put Jack in danger?

...

"It's no use...", I mumbled as I rolled around restlessly in bed, waiting for an answer for all the questions swimming around in my head, only to end up with a headache out of all that thinking. I had to stop my wandering mind for today. Tomorrow, I had to be in top shape in order to find a way to help the others. It... that was my only way to cope with all of this, that goal. Covering my face with my pillow in order to at least try to get some sleep, I closed my eyes until I dozed off without noticing into the world of unconsciousness.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- MONOBEAR THEATER -<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Once upon a time, there was a rather drop-dead sexy stud of a bear named Monobear who lived in the horribly crappy and sub-standard village of Whathisname"<p>

"The inhabitants of Whathisname were all stupid and ugly and old and probably farted all day constantly. In short, they were all beneath the gorgeous Monobear."

"Naturally, Monobear decided to rise to the most arduous task of overthrowing the completely mediocre government and lead these unremarkable people to prosperity... of Monobear's pockets."

"Not standing a chance, the president was overthrown and rightfully executed by being sent to the sun in a rocket. Having established his obvious superiority, Monobear started his new, brilliant empire at once."

"Figuring that the inhabitants of the now rechristened Monobearland would be useful at least for manual labor, the charming ruler made his subjects work 22 hours a day 7 days a week! Sadly, all of his inhabitants died because they were useless and tired and just not plain good at all and Monobearland never came to pass."

"It was then that Monobear learned a valuable life lesson: Everyone, no matter how big, tall, fat, thin, young, or old... were completely useless and undependable and if you wanted something done, you had to

be Monobear. That was the only way your life had any value at all!"

"This has been Uncle Monobear's Corner of Precious Childhood Fairy Tales! See ya next time, kids!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Well, that's it for today! As always, many thanks for the reviews and for even bothering to look at this fic and for sticking around for over 200K words of this nonsense AU. I'm really glad you people are enjoying it, it makes writing this all the better. So, until next chapter, see ya!<strong>

### 30. 3 - Chapter 3 - Daily Lives E

**\*\*Chapter 30 - Despair-Syndrome - Daily Lives E\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hoo boy, it's been a while, no? <strong>

**\*\*I'm so sorry. I've been experiencing writer's burn out for the past month. I guess Hijack March Madness does that to you! In any case, I'm back with a chapter, and man, it's a doozy! I hope you like it!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

Morning came and with it came a groggy awakening. I didn't sleep very well due to all my current worries, so without wasting too much time, I readied myself with a quick shower and a change of clothes and I jogged to the hospital, hair still wet and dripping as the sun shone brightly despite it only being 8 AM. It made me wonder what season were we in... the weather had been consistent with that of Summer and yet the existence of a winter resort just a few hundred meters away from the normally hot camp grounds threw me for a loop.

It didn't make sense, much like a lot of things in our situation. Like the current sickness that was ailing our friends and... Jack. For such a horrid illness, I was expecting something more... grim in appearance and yet, despite the drastic changes in personality, the affected seemed fine... The file that Snotlout found said that these changes were often rooted in past memories or insecurities. I wonder which one of these is the one source of Jack's change?

...It's no use. No matter how much I think about all of these questions of mine, I never get close to the truth. And so it is that I arrive to the hospital with these queries on my mind. We usually gather at the restaurant and the others are probably there, but right now, I'm not feeling hungry at all. Seeing that no one is on the lobby, I make my way to the patient's room, trying to not run as I reach and yank Jack's door wide open.

The scene playing out in front of me is seriously one you could only see in those stupid romcom dramas. Had my life been reduced to something like that? That's all I can wonder as I see a very awake

and smiling Jack lying in bed with Tooth, who is sleeping soundly. The white haired teen only smiles further as he sees me enter, greeting me with a loud and carefree "hey there", completely unaware of how wrong it is to find him in such a... compromising position.

I try to hide my jealousy as I walk in and ask him. "Jack... what in the world are you doing?"

The Ultimate Mystery still has that glazed-over look in his eyes as he looks at the stirring Ultimate Dentist, who no doubt is waking up because of how loud Jack is being. "Oh, I'm just having a nap here with this cutie." He then turns to face me with a sly smirk. "Wanna lay down with me too? There's always space in my bed and in my heart for someone as cute as you, Hiccup."

I suppress a groan and I purposefully neglect to mention the fact that we are dating. Hearing Jack say my name instead of that pet name of his just feels wrong, especially since I know he's acting under the influence of the disease. So instead, I decide to sidestep the offer, despite how tempting it is. "No, thanks."

Tooth finally wakes up, blinking slowly as she rises from bed, before opening her eyes fully aware of her situation. With a start and a telling blush, she jumps out of the hospital bed she was sharing with Jack, before she starts speaking with a flustered tone of voice. "I-I'm sorry! I-I swear it's not what it looks like! I'd never-! Not with him- I mean! I was just so t-tired from taking care of everyone else and J-Jack offered to scoot over and a bed looked so tempting and I-I swear I had no ulterior motives! P-please believe me, Hiccup!"

The way she was moving around, I was getting dizzy from watching her multi-colored hair move with each gesture. Still, I could tell right away... she was being sincere. What was I even thinking? Was I really going to become a jealous, paranoid person, with Tooth of all people? I knew I could trust her; after the last incident, there was no way she would ever hurt me deliberately. We both... came out of that incident with some scars we would rather not reopen.

I smiled in a reassuring way. "It's alright. Really, I believe you.", I paused as she looked at me incredulously, her begging stopping midway. "Thank you for taking care of everyone. Sorry for any problems he might have caused." I said as I looked at Jack, who merely winked back at me.

Tooth blanched for a second before smiling, relief visible in her features. "A-ah! It was no problem, really! We're all used to Jack's mischievous ways, so it was easy!"

We shared a knowing look. Yeah, we all were used to each other by now, we pretty much knew each other's quirks and mannerisms. Which is why this disease was so troubling; a wild card in our interactions and perception of each other. We had to find a way to get rid of it to get back a sense of normalcy as soon as we could.

I took out my ElectroID and checked the clock. 8:20 AM. I pocket the device before looking at the Ultimate Dentist again. "We should go to the lobby, maybe the others will be there." At that, Tooth nods before looking at Jack all while biting her lower lip. "Sure, I'll be there in a second. Let me just check on Rapunzel and the other

patients and we'll meet you there."

I nod at her words and then I walk over to Jack, who is looking at me with an expectant smile. I reach towards his hand and hold it in mine, giving it a firm squeeze, taking in the abnormal heat he's giving off... a symptom of the illness that is making our interactions fake and acted from one side. "Don't worry Jack... we'll find a way to save you all. I'll be back shortly."

The white haired teen smiles innocently as he looks at my hand. "I'll always be waiting for you, handsome."

I force a smile, and with a last squeeze, I let go of Jack's hand before making my way out of the room.

...I wonder if its foolish of me to want to believe that those words of his... were sincere?

Those thoughts are what accompany me as I reach the lobby.

\* \* \*

><p>When I arrived into the lobby, I found the rest of the group, looking a bit glum. No doubt they were worried about the others and the illness that was ailing us. I tried my best to have a cheery disposition, and with a clap of my hands, I caught everyone's attention.<p>

I could tell my forced smile wasn't doing anything good on their morale, but I had to try.

"Well...! Let's get started! Any ideas on what to do?"

Flynn shrugged. "Eh, I guess all we can do is search for the cure. We might have missed something on the other areas since we weren't exactly looking for it before."

I suddenly remembered the Octagon. It was a long shot, since a cure wasn't exactly a weapon... but it had a lot of chemicals in there. I nodded towards Flynn. "Yeah, I think that's a good plan."

Rapunzel and Tooth walked in on us just as Fishlegs whined. "Oh... what's even the point? Don't you remember what the Baymax file said? The illness is incurable after 6 hours and we're well past that point by now!"

"Still, Monobear did say that he would cure everyone in the event that a killing happens, so I think the file itself could be outdated.", countered Peter.

"Yeah, the notepad I found was pretty damn old. So maybe the file is around the same age as that?", said Snotlout as he scratched the top of his head.

"To think that we would get hope from a promise made by that bear...", said Elsa as she fiddled with her braid.

I had to agree, it was rather ironic. But like it or not, we had to believe in what the Headmaster was saying, even at the risk of that being a lie. We had to believe... if we wanted to move forward.

"So, with that said...", I said, trying to not mind Elsa's scornful glare as I spoke. "Shall we split up and search?"

"Oh, but what about the patients?", asked Rapunzel all of a sudden.

"What of them?", asked Flynn.

"Well... we can't just leave them here and we,", said the blonde as she signaled to Tooth, "want to help you guys search."

"Why can't you just leave them here?", asked Anna. "There shouldn't be anything wrong with that."

"I think what Ms. Solaris is trying to say is this: If we leave the patients alone, there is no guarantee they will not be killed, either by one of us... or by themselves."

Peter's comment left us speechless. No one wanted to admit or say that it was impossible; that someone trying to kill them wasn't a possibility. But after two times... the seed of distrust between us had been planted. Sure, we still believed in each other up to a point, but Monobear's plans had made us unable to trust each other with our life.

I didn't want to leave Jack unguarded either.

With a sigh, Flynn spoke up. "Fine, I guess we'll have to take them with us. I've heard exercise is good for your health, so might as well take 'em for a lil' walk, eh?"

No one objected, except Snotlout who was obviously against the idea of being near the sick. With some discussion between us, we decided on how to split up. The groups would be Jack and I as a pair, Merida, Flynn and Rapunzel as a group and Tooth and the Twins as another pair. Snotlout and Fishlegs ended up pairing up as well, with Anna and Elsa unanimously forming another one.

Agreeing to meet up at the restaurant a little before 7 PM, they all set out of the hospital.

I returned to Jack's room and found the white-haired teen sitting on the edge of his bed, looking energetic and pleased to see me. Upon hearing that we were going for a walk (my own words), he cheered up even more. "I can't wait to go on a date with you!"

"We're already dating.". \_I decided to not voice those thoughts. I didn't know how Jack would react in his current state. "Just get dressed. We need to go soon."

At once, the white haired teen wriggled his eyebrows in a mischievous way. "Oho... you want me to take off my clothes for you?"

\_Yes, please...\_ I MEAN NO. Control your urges, Haddock!

Clearing my throat in order to appear unperturbed, I look away from the grinning teen. "Just... change. I'll wait outside for when you're ready." Without waiting for an answer, I quickly step out of the room and I close the door behind me. It's only a little after that that

Jack steps out in his usual attire and out of that hospital gown that we set off from the hospital.

And as I took Jack's hand to guide him and protect him from any harm, I had to once again tell myself that everything would turn out OK. For him... for us.

I just had to keep believing that.

\* \* \*

><p>Surely, this illness had to be a sort of trial set up by the Norns, for Jack's flirting was driving me up a wall. It was cute at first, and I won't deny that I blushed a little when he said he liked my face and my body and well... everything about me. But soon enough, the charm wore off, mostly because all of those compliments weren't real; they were being spouted on an impulse, they weren't sincere. And they were getting on my nerves.<p>

Still, I had to keep my cool. This... this wasn't Jack's fault, he couldn't help it.

"So, where are we going, my freckled beauty?", asked the white haired teen without any signs of shame.

"We're trying to find a cure for your illness, and I think the Octagon has it.", I answered, trying to not dwell on the fact that Jack was playing with my hand, wriggling his fingers through mine.

"But, Hic, this illness I have... it is love! And I don't want to cure that!"

I rolled my eyes. "Well, I want the old Jack back, so we're going there. C'mon."

"For you, anything.", exclaimed Jack dramatically and I groaned. Seriously... how cheesy can one get?

I tried to steer away the conversation from anything romantic related as we rode the cable car towards the Ski Resort where the Final Dead Room was, but somehow, Jack managed to always insert a compliment or a suggestive sentence back in the conversation.

I would be impressed if it wasn't getting old.

When we got off from the cable car, Jack's eyes lit up as he saw the snow once again, and for a brief moment, I dared to hope that he would run around in the cold whiteness as he did when he saw it the first time, but...

"The whiteness of this snow is as pure as my love for you, Hic!", shouted the Ultimate Mystery as he swept his arm over the white expanse before us.

A sense of sadness filled my heart at his response. He really... wasn't thinking like the old Jack at all. He was like a completely different person.

This only steeled my resolve. This wasn't the Jack I had fallen in



love with, and I wouldn't stand for Monobear's motive any longer. I needed to get that cure.

However, by the time I got to the Final Dead Room, I must admit my resolve wavered a bit. I had no issues with entering the room. After all, Monobear said that I had unlimited access to the room because I had cleared his little game.

But Jack hadn't

And in his current state... no, even if he was healthy... I wasn't going to allow him face a life-and-death situation like this.

And yet... I couldn't leave Jack outside of the room by himself. Thor knows what he would do unsupervised with his illness. Still, this had to be done; there could be a chance the cure was in there.

"Wait right here.", I said to the white haired teen, who was simply looking at me with a dreamy look on his face. "Without moving.", I re-stated. "In this spot... argh, you know what I mean!"

"Sure thing, babe."

With a groan, I stepped into the Final Dead Room. I literally had no way to respond to that. The only thing I could do was hurry up and search the place as fast as... well, Hiccup-ly possible.

However, as I scoured the cabinets that contained all those foreign substances, I found myself realizing a single, unchangeable truth.

"I... have no idea what any of these chemicals do."

It was true. As I took bottle after bottle and read name upon foreign name, I started to realize something: No matter how smart I was in comparison to the rest of Berk's populace, I was... not an expert on the field of medicine or chemistry or anything related to this.

With a frustrated groan, I put back all the bottles I had examined. This was getting me nowhere. It wouldn't do me any good to carry any of these potentially hazardous substances outside; knowing me, I would end up dead due to my own clumsiness. If only there was a way to consult with someone about these chemicals.

...My mind wandered to the library. If there was any place that had info on a variety of subjects, it was there. And the place wasn't far away either. With that being my next goal, I exited the Final Dead Room and sighed with relief when I saw Jack watching the falling snow with a gentle smile.

Him looking like that... he looked sane, healthy. If I wanted that to be a possibility, I had to step up my game. Beckoning Jack to follow me, I walked towards MiM's Library. It had been a while since I had read a book, but I'd never thought I would do so again under circumstances like this.

The silence of the library... I was expecting that. What I wasn't expecting was the constant wailing that assaulted our ears when we stepped into the almost-regal like building. Predictably, we found Rapunzel and Merida on one of the tables of the library, the blonde

trying to console the red-head's fears.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Merida. Learning is good for you!"

"B-but there's so much I don't know! I-I'M SCARED OF THE UNKNOWN!"

With a defeated sigh, Rapunzel let his head fall on the table, her face completely obscured with her golden mane.

"I take it you're not a very good nurse...?", I asked as we made our way to the Ultimate Painter, who greeted us with a tired smile.

"No... she actually was very calm in the hospital, but I guess I dragged her out of her comfort zone.", admitted the blonde as she looked at the red-head, who was shedding big tears.

"Hey, don't worry babe.", said Jack as he made his way to the Ultimate Archer. "There's nothing to worry about. I will protect you!"

"B-but... you're the most scary thing in this whole building!", shouted Merida as she recoiled away from the white haired teen, whose smile wavered a little. I had to admit, the fact that Merida was the only person able to bring Jack down, even in illness, was amusing.

"In any case...", I said, trying to regain control of the conversation. "What are you doing here, Rapunzel?"

"Oh!", exclaimed the blonde, "I was trying to find out more info about the Despair-Syndrome and the cure. I thought that if there was something to be found about it, it would be here." She then looked at me with a confused smile. "And you?"

I shrugged. "Eh, mostly the same reason as you. I thought I could borrow a book from the library so I could identify some chemicals in the Final Dead Room. You know, the cure might be hidden there."

"Yeah, that's true... it's a shame I can't go there... it sounds interesting!", said Rapunzel in a wistful tone.

"It's only exciting for the likes of Monobear, I assure you.", I answered, trying to dissuade her from even entertaining the thought of going there; there was no way I was going to put Rapunzel in danger.

"Hahah, I guess...", laughed the blonde before frowning. "Still, I think you're out of luck, Hiccup. According to the library's directory, there's no books about chemicals in their records."

"Well, isn't that just fantastic?!", I shouted. This was no doubt the Headmaster's will, trying to prevent me from cheating the system. With a sigh, I fell defeated on a nearby chair. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"Well, whining won't get you anywhere, kiddo.", said Flynn as he walked towards the table with a hefty amount of books. "If you have time to lament, you have time to search elsewhere, no?"

"Flynn, be polite.", said Rapunzel, but I interrupted.

"No, he's... actually on point. You're right... I guess I should do that.", I said to the Ultimate Thief, who gave me a nod.

"Really, relax, kiddo. You can leave this place to us. We'll find something useful, for sure. You go on and search somewhere else, OK?"

I nodded at the somewhat-reassuring smile from Flynn. Sure, he was sometimes a bit of a jerk, but he still had his priorities straight. I had been all caught up in my worrying and anxiety I had forgotten to be more productive.

But just as I was about to go off and search somewhere else...

"Uh... Jack? What's wrong?"

That worry I had managed to suppress rose at an alarming rate, matching my current mood. The white-haired teen had lost all the frivolous flirty behavior and he was now clutching his head, grimacing in pain. He gave a teary-eyed look with squinted eyes and that's when I knew something was very wrong.

"H...Hiccup? W-when did you get... back...?"

"Huh?", was all I could answer. "Get back from where...?"

Jack's stare was one of confusion as he looked me over.

"A..nd when did you... get so small? N-no... why are you...?", his question got cut off as he clutched his head while he screamed, losing his balance momentarily to the point that he had to kneel.

"Jack?! Hey... what's wrong?!", I rushed to his side and placed a hand on his shoulder. The heat he was giving off was ridiculous, seeing how I was able to sense it through the hoodie. Had his sickness advanced to the next stage?

The whitette simply shook his head, hissing in pain, before muttering. "Jack...? Why would he.. be here, I-!"

An agonizing scream pierced the air as Jack fully collapsed on the floor. He trashed about for a few seconds before he stopped moving, his consciousness leaving him. Panic had settled on my chest at the display and I was seriously freaking out. But amid the frenetic stirring of emotions in my head, something decisive sprung in my mind.

"Help me get him to the hospital! Please!"

Rapunzel and Flynn quickly sprung to action at my command, the Ultimate Thief giving me a hand as I tried to haul Jack to his feet. Flynn and I managed to carry Jack out of the library, Rapunzel and a

very frightened Merida hot on our heels.

"\_Odin, please let him be OK. Please..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>Jack had said a lot of weird things but that didn't matter right now. His wellbeing was my priority.<p>

"Will he be OK?"

It was all I could ask as I paced in front of Jack's hospital bed. The white-haired teen hadn't moved an inch after he had passed out and I was this close to breaking down at the lack of stimuli from him.

"Can you please stop doing that?! It's stressing me out!", yelled Snotlout irritated, but before I could respond, Tooth silenced us both.

"Quiet! I can't concentrate if you guys don't stop yelling! This is a hospital, for god's sake!"

"Sorry." It would be hilarious, the fact that we answered in unison to the rainbow-haired girl, but I wasn't in the mood for laughter.

"What even happened?", asked Elsa. Everyone had reconvened in the hospital as soon as the news about Jack's collapse reached them through instant messaging. They were pretty much out of the loop, as we didn't have any time to explain anything. But now was the time.

"I-I don't know!", I began, trying to get my orders in thought. "We were just talking in the library when all of a s-sudden, Jack started to clutch his head and... say weird stuff before he collapsed!"

"Weird stuff...?", this was the first time in a while since I had heard Anna talk and I felt guilt at once. But I decided not to show how much it had affected me, the fact that a previously-talkative and cheery girl had been reduced to a shut down being.

"Y...yeah...", I nodded towards the Ultimate Hiker. "He started to say something about... when did I get back and... why I was so small..." I looked around to gauge everyone's reaction.

Peter was deep in thought before he spoke up, realization clear in his face. "Perhaps... he was starting to remember?"

"Remember what?", asked Ruffnut, completely lost. But I knew what he was talking about. There was no way I was going to ever forget that.

"You mean... his lost memories?"

Peter nodded at my answer, before continuing. "And... about our own lost memories; our school years. The ones Monobear claims to have taken from us."

Everyone was silent at his words. Flynn chuckled awkwardly, trying to break the dark mood. "H-hey... I thought we all had agreed that... that was all just a lie from Monobear, no?"

"OH, COME ON!", Snotlout's outburst startled me. "How can you still don't fucking believe that? I mean... I don't want to believe that bear but... all the files and info we found... they mention things we don't remember at all, but they are things we SHOULD fucking know! So...", he trailed off as he kicked at the floor dejectedly. "I don't want to believe that bear's claims... but we have to accept the fact that he stole our damn school memories."

"So...", began Fishlegs as he trailed off. "So if the illness is returning our school memories... should we even try to find the cure...?"

"What are you trying to say?", asked Elsa, sounding a bit accusatory.

"W-WELL... I mean, if we get our memories back, we can finally learn what the truth is... so maybe getting sick won't be so bad...?", finished Fishlegs, sounding unsure.

"W-what?!", my voice rose with disbelief. "And, what, do you plan to have your memories back with a side dish of I-may-end-up-murdering-someone? Are you out of your mind?!"

"Besides...! We don't even know if the illness can actually return our memories in general! What if this is Jack's despair-syndrome strain only? We can't just give up and let all of us get sick!", argued Tooth as she put a damp towel to Jack's forehead.

"I-I don't want everyone to get sick...! That's \*hic\*, too SCARY! \*sniff\*"

Merida's crying mirrored our sentiments to Fishlegs' proposition. It didn't even need to be considered. Saying that we should all just give up when this illness will kill us in the end was of... incredibly poor taste.

"Sorry...", Fishleg's meek demeanor got across the point that he wasn't going to suggest that anymore, much to our collective relief.

"So, what do we do now?', asked Rapunzel as she bit her thumb. No one spoke up, unsure about what to do. Snotlout, however, appeared to have an idea of what to do.

"I dunno about you guys, but I ain't going to sit here doing nothing. I will strengthen my body and its defenses so no fever gets to me!", he put his fist to his palm with a confident smirk. "An all-night work out session! That will keep me healthy!"

"...Even though the despair-syndrome is being administered through an injection that no amount of excercise will prepare you for?", muttered Elsa.

"S-shut-up!", shouted Snotlout, flustered as he turned to leave. "I'll see you losers later! If ya need me, I'll be at the Heavy

Lifting Room at 10." And with that, and not waiting for any objections, he left the room, pretty much deciding for all of us what we should do.

"I guess we should just do whatever we want for now?", asked Flynn.

"Preferably, do something to find the cure. We have no time to waste.", added Peter sternly, to which Flynn answered dismissively with a wave of his hand.

"Me and Rapunzel will keep a watch on the patients.", said Tooth as she stood up, before wobbling a little. She looked extremely tired.

"Err, on that note.", I said as I walked over to Jack's bed. "How about I take your place for tonight? I can keep an eye on Jack. You should probably get some rest."

Tooth's smile was weary as she looked at me. "Do I really look that bad...?"

"A doctor should take care of themselves!", asserted Rapunzel. "I read that in a book! So I agree with Hiccup. You should rest. We can take care of the sickies by ourselves!"

Tooth laughed at that. "Alright, alright... I'll be sleeping in the medical staff's room if you need me. Please take care of yourselves and if there's an emergency-"

"I'll have everything under control!", said Rapunzel as she urged Tooth to leave. "Now go before you collapse! We don't want another incident like the one you had for your dentistry license..."

Tooth's eyes widened. "Rapunzel! Don't say that out loud...!", puffing her cheeks, she finally walked towards the door. "Fine! I'm going! But not a word of that to anyone, OK?!"

"Just get some sleep!", and with that, Tooth left before hesitating a bit. I turned to face Rapunzel.

"Do I even want to know...?" I asked.

The Ultimate Painter shook her head. "I won't tell you even if you ask!"

"So...", interrupted Flynn. "I guess we're good? Can we go?"

I nodded towards him. "Yeah! Hopefully... you'll find something."

"We will, Haddock.", assured Peter with confidence. "Now... if you excuse us..."

And with those quick words, the rest of them left the hospital, which only left Rapunzel, Merida, the Twins and I in Jack's room. I hadn't realized how cluttered we were in here. The blonde smiled at me before taking the Tuffnut's and Merida's hands.

"I'll escort these back to their rooms.", her smile turned

mischievous. "I'll leave Jack in your capable Viking hands."

I was taken aback a little. "Uh, sure. You can count on me."

Rapunzel left the room with her entourage and an unwarranted giggle. Honestly... just because I don't look like a Viking, it doesn't give them the right to tease me!

...

As the sudden quietness of solitude enveloped me, I let out a breath I was holding. Scooting over a chair next to Jack's bed, I sat down and stared at the Ultimate Mystery.

He looked so peaceful, so oblivious to his situation... so unlike how he looked back at the library; confused, disoriented, scared. Had he really... remembered something? But what was it? Was it really because of this despair-syndrome... or was there something else at play here?

Play...

Playing was what I was doing as I twirled a strand of white hair in my finger, as I delicately ran my hand through his white, soft locks. For such a windswept look, his hair was in such good condition, it made me a little jealous, but mostly... it filled me with awe. His hair was a mess, yet in my eyes, it was just perfect. His skin was pale and almost devoid of blemishes save for some barely visible birthmarks.

He... he really was handsome. And someone like me... someone so imperfect, so ugly by society's standards, had been able to somehow attract him.

But it wasn't just looks. He was something else, able to be optimistic even in this dire situation with nothing to his name. And he had admired me as much as I admire him...

I guess... I have to live up to his expectations now.

I idly pass the time thinking along those lines, taking in every detail about Jack that I had missed due to not really paying attention to him before hand, and before I know it, I fall asleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- MONOBEAR THEATER -<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"Jack. Jack. Jack. Jack."<p>

"Have you noticed? In our daily lives, the word "Jack" is everywhere!"

"Jack-et. Jumping Jacks. Jack-al. Jack-ing. Jack-in-the-Box... it's everywhere! But what could this mean?! Is this a conspiracy?! What if....!"

"What if there's some kind of Jack people, an ancient race that is trying to infiltrate us and then take over in a hostile manner, in a bid to become the ruling race?! That's it! I cracked the mystery! I'll be a hero if I kill all the Jacks in this rotten world!"

"...Whazzat? Linguistic roots? Coincidences...?"

"...T-that's something a Jack would say! S-shut up!"

\* \* \*

><p>I'm shaken awake by someone and it takes me a few seconds to fight through the daze before I realize Rapunzel is calling my name frantically.<p>

"W-what...? What's wrong...?", I manage to say as I try to get a bearing on my surroundings. It's suddenly gotten dark, no doubt I have been awakened in the middle of the night.

"Hiccup! I can't find the Twins!"

At that, I immediately turn towards Jack's bed. To my relief, he's still there, sleeping peacefully, so I turn around to face the blonde.

"Tooth is already searching for them."

"Is... is Merida?", my question gets answered in an instant.

"No... she's, she's alright! When I woke up, she was still there but...", Rapunzel groaned, "Why, oh why did I decide to take a nap in her room! I thought I had only slept for a few minutes, but when I woke up, it was already 5 AM!"

"You call 10 hours a nap?", I asked, impressed.

"I know I messed up, but you need to help us find them!", begged the blonde.

This... was weird. Where were the Twins? But we couldn't just let them wander around in the dark in that condition, so I nodded and stood up.

As I walked towards the lobby, I ran into Tooth. She approached us, looking extremely agitated, but she didn't miss a beat as she walked towards me. "I already contacted everyone else. They shouldn't be far from here, but just to be sure, I need you guys to spread out through the camp and look for them."

She sounded so in command that I didn't hesitate. "Got it."

With our priorities set, Rapunzel and I ran out of the hospital. The blonde girl spoke up immediately. "I'll check the lake!"

"I'll check the restaurant.", I said with as much conviction as possible and without wasting any more time, we set off in opposite directions, our intentions clear.

A seed of dread had been planted in my chest. This kind of



situation... No... it couldn't be, right? There was no way right?

A seed of dread that bloomed the instant that familiar announcement rang. I stopped dead in my tracks.

\*Ding dong, ding dong...\*

"A body has been discovered in the gym! After a certain amount of time has passed, the Class Trial will begin!"

...

This couldn't be... this can't be...

Without realizing it, I had spoken those words of denial out loud. I didn't wait for anyone else to come, I didn't look around to see if someone else had heard the announcement or if they were going over there. In that fear-filled, disbelief-fueled state of mind, a numbness encased me.

A numbness that quickly faded only to be replaced with a drive. A drive to see if what that accursed bear had said just a few moments ago had been true. I was in autopilot, really, as I ran to the Gym with all my might, hoping, daring to see that Monobear was just messing around.

Hoping that, upon entering the lobby, I would find the twins there, laughing over something stupid. Believing that, OK I didn't find them in the hall that lead to the gym's lobby but... , believing that I would find them fighting it out in the reception desk lobby of the gym. Praying that, right... I didn't see them in the reception desk area... but maybe... maybe they...

Seeing a door unlocked, and finding it odd, I used the last of my energy to trot over. Doors in this place wouldn't be unlocked... unless a living person was on there, right? So... the Twins had to be alive, right? I reached the door, my breath held and the scene I saw...

Robbed me of it, and any sense of reason, as I saw... her in a sea of her own blood... someone who I wasn't expecting to see. Someone that had no business being here... someone who wasn't supposed to be dead according to Monobear... but that was...

Because I couldn't deny the fact that Anna Arendelle, the Ultimate Hiker, was laying dead in the Olympic Pool Room, against all possible odds.

\* \* \*

><p>"What...?"<p>

I should have screamed. I should have done anything else but to ask that. But my mind couldn't keep up. The Twins had been missing... and a body discovery announcement had been effectuated. And yet... the one who turned up dead was...?

Anna?

That... didn't make a lick of sense.

"N-no way..."

A voice besides mine broke me off my numb-like stupor. I looked around and I found Snotlout a little ways into the room, but still near the door and no way near the body, aghast and shocked.

A body discovery announcement is only aired when three people find a body. I see... so Snotlout had found the body and thus, that's why it triggered.

So... she, Anna... was really dead.

The thick smell of blood assaulted my nostrils and it confirmed that fact even more. I couldn't take this. Another killing, another dead friend... another life-or-death situation. This... were we doomed to end this way? Would Monobear keep repeating this until we all ended like her?

Not being able to take the scene in front of me, I stepped out of the room, out of that place that reeked of death. Feeling off balance, I made my way towards the lobby. As I walked towards the reception desk to rest against it, however, I found Flynn and Fishlegs gathered around it, looking behind it, with Peter and Rapunzel standing near the entrance. Flynn soon after left the reception desk and beckoned the two by to entrance to follow him, something in hand. Peter and Rapunzel made to follow the Ultimate Thief without getting near the reception desk.

None of their actions made sense, but even though I was wondering why they were going to the Combat Room, I was even more intrigued by Fishlegs. He hadn't moved an inch... and he was looking extremely green.

I groggily made my way towards the reception desk, and I found myself not escaping the scent of blood from the Olympic Pool room, but rather walking towards it. A sense of fear started to grow in my heart and by the time I looked at what Fishlegs had looked, I suddenly understood why I felt that way.

And yet found myself unable to understand anything that was happening right now.

A horrified screech.

\*Ding dong, ding dong\*. "A body has been discovered! After a certain amount of time has passed, the Class Trial will begin!"

Those two things happened at the same time, as I took in the gruesome scene in front of me. Laying together, as they always did, were the Twins, their...their skulls cracked gruesomely, their hospital gowns stained scarlet, and undoubtedly... dead.

I felt sick. Dizzy. Confused.

Why. Why why why why why was this happening.

How could this be happening?!

That was the only coherent thought my brain was able to form after

this, in this sea of death and blood I found myself in.

Approaching steps made me look away from my two dead friends, and what I saw was a perplexed and distraught Flynn, his eyes heavy. His lips trembled, the Ultimate Thief uncharacteristically struggling to get his words out.

But eventually, they did get out, after he looked at the twins and both Fishlegs and I, as if trying to get a grip on this weird reality we were living in now. And when they did get out, I too, had to take a minute or ten to process them.

"Elsa... Elsa is dead..."

No matter how much I thought about them, no matter how much I stood there... I couldn't come to grips with this reality. It was madness, devoid of any reason. It was pure, nonsensical and unadulterated despair.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 3 - Despair-Syndrome - Daily Lives END<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I told you guys this was going to be a doozy.<strong>

\*\*And that this was going to be a short arc.\*\*

\*\*And so, here we are, in the eve before another Class Trial. So excited! Are you excited? I sure am. I hope the mystery will be to your liking!\*\*

\*\*Again, I apologize for being so silent this month, but hopefully, that won't happen again! I want to return to both of my fics I miss 'em.\*\*

\*\*So, without further adieu... adios! For now. See ya next time!\*\*

31. null

\*\*Chapter - null -\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>null POV<strong>

The cold breeze caressed Jack's cheek, a nice relief from the overbearing Summer heat. He had a clear view of the twilight-bathed city from Hope's Peak's roof, the building paying tribute to its namesake; he truly felt like he was at the peak of the world whenever he came up here after a hard day of classes. Classes matching in difficulty to those who attend such a prestigious establishment. Naturally talented or otherwise. He loved Hope's Peak, but sometimes, he needed to catch a break.

Even though gazing over the horizon cleared his mind of dreaded

schoolwork, it had the unfortunate side-effect of making his thoughts wander to other, less desirable and yet not unwelcome thoughts.

Thoughts of loneliness, furnished with a touch of absence, the one that can only be felt when someone you love and deeply care about is not here.

It had been almost 3 months since he last saw Hiccup. It wasn't that the Viking was some class-skipping renegade or a hooligan of sorts. It's just that, among the Ultimates, Hiccup was a special case. Due to his talent, he had some special privileges and some sort of mission on behalf of Hope's Peak. As such, he had to travel around the world to fulfill this mission and he had to leave on constant basis and extended periods of time.

Jack understood he had to do this in behalf of the world's hope, but if anyone asked him what he thought of the constant absences of his boyfriend, he would frankly answer: it sucks.

Hiccup thought the same whenever Jack asked him about it but both of them understood the need of this mission. Times were turbulent and if the rumors were true, the world certainly needed all the hope it could need. That didn't really make this any more bearable. But it made their reunions even more special.

Almost as if his thoughts had been heard by a benevolent god, Jack saw a familiar dark figure approaching Hope's Peak and his mood instantly rose. There was no way he was going to mistake that sleek, black figure soaring through the air. He would recognize those pirouettes and stunts anywhere; only Hiccup would dare to pull them off in mid-flight and that was pretty much all the confirmation he needed; his boyfriend was back.

Jack rushed to greet the landing Night Fury, who greeted him with a nice, usual, lick assault. He barely got out Toothless' greetassault before he nearly lost his balance at Hiccup's tackle-like embrace. Jack returned it earnestly, squeezing as hard as he could, feeling as if he let go, he would lose the auburn-haired 20 year old.

A groan was soon followed by a hearty laugh, in that nasally-voice Jack had made fun of, but that he in truth adored. "I take it by the force of your hug that you missed me?". Jack hug tighter, a smile spreading on his lips, before answering. "Why, whatever gave you that idea, Hic?"

The truth was, that Jack did miss Hiccup a lot whenever he went away. His school life had improved drastically in the 3 years he had attended Hope's Peak Academy: His talent had been recognized, he had made lots of friends, both close and acquaintances, and his heart swelled up with pride when Emma, his little sister, got accepted into Hope's Peak Academy's Elementary School branch. She was always a brilliant and talented girl so Jack wondered what took Hope's Peak so long to recognize her. His brother had even gotten into Hope's Peak as well. In short, Jack had the whole Overland Triumvirate experience for himself and things were going great, even his grades. His mother was so proud of them.

And yet...

"I guess the fact that you're squeezing the life out of me gave me that particular idea, yes..."

Jack chuckled at Hiccup's remark and broke the hug, immediately taking the other's gloved hands in his, and taking a good look at his boyfriend, mostly out of concern (Hiccup's journeys were dangerous) but also because he simply liked to look at how he had changed over the years.

"I'm surprised you can even feel anything under that mess you wear.", commented Jack with a wink, teasing Hiccup's black flight suit the Viking had designed both for the missions and for fun. A far cry from the clothes Hiccup used to wear when he assisted to all classes in Hope's Peak constantly. And that wasn't the only different thing. In the 5 years he had known him, the little Viking had gotten a growth spurt that put them at equal height (if only because Jack had also grown), his hair had grown to become an even messier brown mop (that thankfully Astrid had managed to get under control somewhat, bless her meddlesome best friend tendencies), and Jack had to grudgingly agree with the stares of the female student body; Hiccup had certainly gotten more handsome (not that it mattered to Jack, for he liked him before his growth spurt.)

"What, now I'm an unfeeling thing just because I wear a flight suit? Not cool." retorted Hiccup with a raised eyebrow.

And yet, the more things change, the more they stay the same. That comment he just delivered was proof of that. No matter how much he had grown physically, Hiccup was still that reserved, nerdy, awkward and sarcastic kid he had known for 5 years. One who didn't open himself to everyone but that still would talk to you. One that, if you get to know him, would surprise you with all his quirks and thoughts. One that, despite the scathing remarks, was still a gentle, but brave soul who cared about the others and what they thought of him. The one that had stolen Jack's heart and was not only the person he loved, but the one he trusted the most as a friend and something more. He really missed Hiccup when he left, so he had to make the most of these visits.

"You don't need the suit to be unfeeling. You already are for leaving me behind a lot.", followed Jack as he stuck his tongue out. He was surprised as his lips were met by the other's, a quick, but teasing peck that taunted Jack's longing knowingly. The cocky smile in Hiccup's face was proof of that.

"How's that for unfeeling?"

"You jerk." answered Jack as he looked to the side with a childish pout. Hiccup laughed out loud, Toothless trying to ignore the embarrassingly spectacle the two males were putting on. Sometimes the Night Fury wondered how could humans be so cheesy?

The pair started to make their way down the roof, Hiccup reassuring Toothless they would leave in the morning, the black dragon left to his own devices. They walked through the empty school halls, deserted either because some students were still taking after-school classes, or they had already retired home or to the dormitory complex. Jack enjoyed holding Hiccup's hand as they traversed the school; he still couldn't believe he was able to do so without any much of a reaction from everyone else. He still remembered those first turbulent years

where everyone made a huge deal over their relationship; both positively and negatively. And though Jack was no pushover and he had the support of his friends and family, it still was stressful for him. Thankfully, Director Manny put an end to that. Now... Now Jack could enjoy the full Haddock experience, so to speak.

"So, how's the mission with Valka going?", asked Jack conversationally.

Hiccup shrugged, not letting go of Jack's hand. "It's going well, mostly. Honestly? It's going so well, I think Tadashi's reports are mostly exaggerated."

Jack snickered. "Maybe Hiro is the one actually writing them... the kid has a penchant for theatrics, like someone I know." teased Jack, which earned him a deadpan glare from the auburn man.

"Harr harr. We both know who is the biggest drama queen in this relationship. Here's a hint: it isn't me."

Jack laughed at Hiccup's retort, the Viking joining in as they both at last reached Jack's dormitory. The door gave away easily as he unlocked the ElectroID and both of them. "OK, I'll admit that we both kind of overreact a lot." Both of them stepped into the room, clearly tailored to Jack's tastes. "But there is no way I'm the one who makes a mountain out of a molehill."

Hiccup quirked an eyebrow with a teasing smirk. "Oh, really? Who was the one who thought that Astrid and Tadashi were pining for me and trying to take me away from you last year?"

Jack blushed and coughed awkwardly. "OK, but that... was a legitimate thing! I swear I saw someone that looked like them putting chocolates on your locker."

"Even though Astrid and Merida have been a thing since our third year here and Tadashi is obviously and outspokenly ace?", challenged Hiccup trying to contain his laughter.

"W-well... you know... shut up.", finished Jack as he crossed his arms, bitterly-and at the same time not- stewing in his defeat. Despite how lighthearted their banter had been, Jack's fear was real. They had been in a relationship for so long, and it wasn't perfect, but he liked to think it was a strong, stable one. And yet, whenever Hiccup left, ideas flooded the other teen's mind. Worst-case scenarios where Hiccup would never return, either because he... \_had died\_... on a mission or... because he had found someone better for him. It scared Jack. He knew distance could destroy relationships and the dread he had harbored over something happening to them had grown with each passing year, especially after Hiccup's absences grew in length.

Hiccup sensed the discomfort in the other male and approached him gently, before embracing him as strong as he could. He spoke to Jack's ear, his breath making Jack shiver. "Hey, don't worry. I would never, ever forget or leave you. You...", a pause. "You were the first one who saw who I really was. You didn't judge me for my talent or my appearance. Aside from Toothless, you were my first, true friend."

"There's no way I could ever... forget that. Ever. If you wanted to keep me away from you, they'd have to kill me."

"Don't even joke about.", answered Jack, sounding serious.

"Deal.", answered Hiccup with a smile as he broke the hug and looked intently at the other's eyes. "In exchange, you will stop thinking I'm just going to leave you or such nonsense."

As if to answer. Jack closed the distance, and their lips met. This kiss was different than the other one. Whereas the first was teasing and good-natured, this one held a different meaning; longing and loneliness. It was a sort of desperate kiss, but also one that got his feelings through Hiccup: He had missed him a lot. He was being serious about it, and he wanted to make Hiccup know about it. The brunette returned the kiss just as strongly, earning a surprised reaction from Jack, but he was happy to oblige and deepen it. It was the sort of exchange one could only have between two people who were linked by something else than mere affection. It was an intoxicating feeling, strong enough to submerge the both of them in their own little world.

Despite what Hiccup had said, how strongly he felt about his mission and despite the fact that he knew that it was important, there were moments his resolve faltered. This was one of those moments. Though he wasn't exactly alone whenever he was out there in the world, and despite the fact that he had teased Jack about it just a few moments ago, the truth of the matter was that he missed the other teen terribly. And he had also... thought of worst-case scenarios where Jack got bored of waiting for him and left him for someone else. But, right now, being here, with Jack... he came to think that all his worrying was absurd.

Hiccup deepened the kiss, trying to convey those feelings; that he had missed him terribly as well. And that he was glad Jack had waited for him this long and that he appreciated the patience he had for someone like him. A moan escaped Jack's mouth; he had gotten the message loud and clear. For once, he was glad all the rooms in Hope's Peak were soundproof. Hiccup took that as a sign to continue his advances and in an infuriatingly slow way, the Viking slid his lips teasingly down Jack's jawline and neck, before deciding to leave a mark there.

Jack didn't care about anything else right now. He wanted to encase himself in this feeling and forget his worries. Who cared about the looming threat of Ultimate Despair? Who cared about exams and classes and grades? Right now, he didn't. He wanted to enjoy this moment. Jack closed his eyes and moved his neck a little to let his boyfriend have more space to work while trying to think of ways of how to "repay" Hiccup when...

When he opened his eyes...

And looked to the side... and caught his reflection in the mirror on a corner of his room. He was staring at himself, all right. Same face... same... brown eyes... Same... brown hair he had... always... h... had...?

Brown eyes... not blue...?

Brown hair... not white...?

As if something had cracked, the scenery in front of Jack (that's who I am!) began to fizzle out. Cracks in space visible. Shards of reality falling out of place before his very eyes. And then blackness. Emptiness. Void. A complete disconnection from reality. Jack's... I... can feel my mind floating in the unconsciousness that plagues me. This feeling of disconnection rose from a contradiction Jack... I... had just seen.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

I... don't understand!

I don't get this!

I... I am Jack Overland! I'm sure of it... But...! But...! The one I saw in that reflection was most definitely not me. That was my twin brother, Jackson Overland. And yet... And yet! There is no mistake: Those memories felt real to me. I could remember every feeling, every line, ever thought in that landscape of the mind. It really was my memory... but...

But if that is the case, then what...? What does this mean? Those memories are definitely mine, and that was without a doubt the face of my brother... How could these facts be reconciled? It couldn't be done. I was, without a doubt, Jack Overland. Me having memories of my brother... was impossible. My head was throbbing because of this train of thought. It really... was a set of irreconcilable circumstances.

I opened my eyes, in an effort to make sense of anything, and I found myself staring at the ceiling of a familiar setting; the hospital at Camp Despair, a stark contrast to the happy memory I had been dreaming off. Was that... a lost memory of mine? The one Monobear had apparently claimed to take away? And yet, if that were true... what did that mean for me? Who was I? There were only two facts I was sure of when I awoke in that cursed room; that my name was Jack Overland and that I had a little sister named Emma who I loved a lot.

I stood up and got off from the hospital bed, and quickly searched for a reflective surface. A cabinet with a mirror stood in the room conveniently, and I took a glance to see myself; for an answer to this confusion I was feeling. A striking head full of white, and a familiar set of blue eyes greeted me and I sighed with relief. I... I was still me. Same features, at stark contrast with the face I had seen in my dreams.

So why... why did I dream that?! Why did I have a dream where I was in the body of my little brother?!

I clutched my head, trying to make a sense out of everything and to assuage my headache. Me having the face of my brother notwithstanding, there were a lot of weird things in that dream. Hiccup looked so grown up and he was apparently on a mission set by Hope's Peak? And we had actually gone to Hope's Peak Academy? What kind of mission was that? Was it a mission against Ultimate Despair?



...And, if that memory was real... did this mean Jackson actually dated Hiccup?

...No, that wasn't important!

What was important... was the fact that it was obvious now. A certain amount of time had passed before our entry to Hope's Peak Academy and our stay here. A far better, calmer time.

At that moment, I noticed two alarming facts.

My wrist was missing something, and I was thinking far more clearly. I still felt like crap, but I wasn't having that hazy feeling clouding my movements and response anymore. I checked my wrist and that's when I noticed that the Monobear Bracelet had popped off, leaving behind two dot-like scars on my skin. Sure enough, I looked towards the bed and the accursed thing was lying on the sheets.

But if it had popped off... then did that mean...

The other alarming fact I had noticed was that Hiccup wasn't around. And the whole hospital was quiet. Eerily so. If my bracelet popped off... then did that mean... that someone had killed another, fulfilling Monobear's request? If so... was Hiccup... was he OK?

Who had died? What was even going on?! Panic started to seize my heart, but I had to get a grip; Lots of nonsensical things were happening, both in my mind and the real world. And though I wanted to get some answers, this wasn't the time. Bearing my headache, I changed myself out of the hospital gown and headed out. I didn't know where a killing had happened. I wasn't even sure if a killing had happened... for all I knew, the others had figured a way to remove them without resorting to bloodshed.

And yet... no one was around... I wanted to believe in them... but I had to be sure. Trying to turn away from the truth could only lead to tragedy. I had to make sure Hiccup was OK... and I had to prepare myself... just in case things have turned out for the worst.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Nevermind me, just inserting a little intermission of sorts before we jump into the real investigative parts of the mystery. As for the contents of this chapter... Well, I hope this gave you plenty of things to think about for the overall mystery of this thing I like to call my fanfic!<strong>

\*\*Otherwise, this is just the prelude to the finale of the third arc. In other words, irrelevant. Yeah! Ignore the contents of this whatsoever, it will never be referenced ever again  
:3c\*\*

\*\*Puhuhuhuhu... See ya later!\*\*

## 32. 3 - Chapter 3 - Deadly Life

\*\*Chapter 32 - Despair-Syndrome - Deadly Life\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And now back to the main plot. Man, it's good to be back to this plotline... its been like, what 15 days since the last time we saw these guys? In any case, enjoy!<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

\_"Elsa... Elsa is dead..."\_

The Twins were gone... their rambunctious, ornery energy sometimes bordering on annoying was gone. They were experts at alleviating the dire ambiance we were currently in, and someone had gone and taken that from us.

Anna was dead too. Regret filled my heart as I remembered how awkward our last interactions had been, if they could even be called that. I wanted to apologize so much to the phantom of a cheery girl that I had unintentionally created, if only to make amends. But now, that was impossible.

And now Elsa. So aloof, so distant, yet her calmness and collected rationale helped our group stay grounded and prevented us from descending into confused madness. Her insight and patience were a ray of hope that had been dashed and torn apart.

And all of them... all our friends... had been killed by one of us. Someone had succumbed to the fear of the threatening disease that had been set loose by Monobear. Someone wanted to escape this situation so badly that they didn't even wait for an alternate solution. Someone had succumbed to despair and sacrificed four people to escape. Why...?

Why...?!

I numbly walked to the Combat Room, vaguely aware that Flynn was following me, in order to confirm what he said. I wanted to at least hope enough that he was mistaken... that Elsa was still somehow alive. Upon entering the room, however, the stench of blood that was becoming ever so familiar greeted me and the scene before me destroyed those hopes. Delicately lying on the floor was the unmistakable figure of Elsa, her beautiful silver hair smeared crimson with blood, a pool of the substance visible under her head. Her Monobear Bracelet had popped off, two small marks on her wrist. That sealed the deal; She was most definitely dead. I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't deal with this so I backed away from the room, Flynn lingering on the door before following me and joining the others in the lobby, where even Snotlout had gathered, his eyes downcast and sad, mirroring the mood that all of us shared, Rapunzel's and Fishlegs' sobs being the only sound that filled the air.

A sound that was soon interrupted by a rancorous laugh, mocking our grief.

"Oh wow! Three students gone?! Wow, you guys sure went on a rampage! I knew the current generation was decadent and lacking in morals but color me surprised!"

I gritted my teeth at Monobear's jerkish prodding. I wasn't in the mood for this. I just waited for him to say his piece and state his business, like he did whenever something like this happened.

"S-so it's true? Did someone...?", asked Tooth, a tear threatening to escape her eyes.

"Murder these guys? Hmm? Why would you even ask that? It's what is supposed to happen. Honestly, you guys keep asking the same silly question and I'm not even going to dignify that with an answer.", Monobear produced a familiar file and he started to pass it to all of us. "All I'm here for is to give you the third Monobear File! I'll see you at the Class Trial then! Oops, I guess that indirectly answered your question? Puhuhuhuhu...!"

With that unsavory laugh, the Headmaster left us with the horrible realization that he was right. Someone had undoubtedly betrayed us all for their own good. And that... that couldn't be forgiven. Using people's lives for your own good... That couldn't be ever, ever forgiven.

"H-how much longer are we going to go through this...?! How many times must we say good bye to our friends?!'", said Rapunzel as she gripped her Monobear File.

"I don't want to deal with this shit anymore! When will that bastard Monobear stop torturing us?!'", yelled Snotlout.

"It doesn't matter."

I could feel everyone's gazes on me as they heard my mumbled words.

"It doesn't matter... all that matters is that we find who did this.", something inside me had snapped and hardened. Because someone had been selfish, our lives were in danger once more. Because of people like that... I lost Toothless. I would...I would never...! "What they have done can't be forgiven. We have to find them a-and... make them pay!"

"Err... I'm as angry as you are about this dude... but we aren't doing this for revenge, OK? We're doing it to survive. I don't enjoy sending people to their deaths.", said Flynn with an uneasy smile and I had to admit he had a point. I didn't want to kill people or be responsible for their deaths... but this bitterness inside me against the Blackened... I felt it was well-justified.

"Either way.", interject Peter, "Whatever our intentions are behind investigating, we should give it our all, as always. We must not forget our lives are at risk and biased observations will lead us away from the truth."

"With that said, we should start. Is everyone OK with this?", finished the Ultimate Fear Expert, his gaze lingering on me, as if he were waiting for my approval to start. Everyone else nodded without saying a word and I did the same. I felt... like he was saying that to me specifically. He's right... he's absolutely right. No matter how much I despise the Blackened right now... I must not draw hasty conclusions. Only unbiased thinking will save us all. I must remain

impartial for now... and once again begin this cycle of doubt and suspicion against my classmates. That... is what the investigation and the Class Trial is all about.

Everyone dispersed themselves from the lobby, walking towards the various crime scenes in the gym, leaving only Peter and me on the reception desk area, where the Twins breathed their last. But just as I was going to start sleuthing...

"Hic!"

My heart skipped a beat as I heard that familiar nickname, that familiar deep voice. I couldn't believe my ears as I heard the sound of footsteps approaching me. And when I turned around, I was subjected to a sudden and tight embrace.

"You're alright...! Thank god you're alright...! I'm so glad...!"

Laced with worry came Jack's voice, and I was taken aback by the wave of relief that was exuding from him. And yet, I returned the hug, because I was just noticing the fact that he...

"Y-yeah... I'm fine. And... apparently, so are you?"

I noticed right away. This affection was genuine, different from the one he was displaying from the Despair-Syndrome. He was also back to his normal temperature, and his bracelet had fallen off. Jack... was alright. He was cured.

"Yep, I'm fit as a fiddle, Hic. Don't worry about me!"

I smiled at Jack's comment. Peter's low chuckle made his presence know, and I could just imagine the smile he wore on his face as he approached us. "It is nice to see that you have returned to your usual level of annoyance. I must admit I missed it."

Over Jack's shoulder, I could see Merida arriving behind him, her face devoid of any sadness and fear. Her wrist was bracelet-free as well. Her face was set in a worry-like scowl, and upon seeing us, she approached us and began to demand for an explanation.

"What's goin' on 'ere?! Where is everyone else?! I heard the bloody Body Discovery Announcement so does that mean...?!"

At that, Jack let go of me and then proceeded to look me over with a firm hand, the teen in front of me completely unaware of the things he was doing to me as he put his hands all over my body. "Are you OK, Hic? Did the Blackened get you...?"

"No, I... I'm OK." I answered as I looked at Peter, then Jack and then Merida. I gulped, unable to find a way to break the news to them. Everyone else started to return to the lobby upon hearing the commotion and I decided on the spot to just blurt out what really had happened. Their reaction upon hearing the news was pretty much the same as ours. Everyone else filled the blanks of my explanation. Jack shook his head in disbelief. Merida's reaction was more subdued but similar in nature to Rapunzel's. She was biting her thumb, this time around not wanting to let any tears fall.

"I can't believe someone would go as far as to hurt Anna or the Twins! Those guys wouldn't harm anyone!", yelled Merida.

"And on top of that, Elsa too? Man... why would they kill so many people...? I just can't believe it...", added Jack. Upon hearing that, Flynn grunted.

"If you don't believe us, then see for yourself.", and with a gesture, he led all of us to the Combat Room, where the Ultimate Figure Skater's corpse laid.

Or... so we thought.

Because when we entered it... Something was wrong.

"Huh?"

"What the?!"

In the Combat Room's floor... was that pool of blood and Elsa's bracelet. But nothing else. Her corpse... Elsa's body was gone. Gone without a trace.

"What is going on here?!", demanded Peter, matching my own thoughts.

"This ain't a fucking trick of the light, right?! We all saw Elsa's body and now its gone?! Why?!", shouted Snotlout.

"Is... is the Blackened trying to destroy evidence?", asked Tooth.

"What if the Blackened is under the Despair-Syndrome's effects and they have a corpse-hoarding disease?!", theorized Rapunzel.

"This is bad... if the Blackened is out there still... then we could have more victims!", said Fishlegs, panic seeping into his voice.

"Geez, you guys sure are noisy and wrong and not as beautiful as me."

Monobear's mocking comment filled the room as he appeared in front of us, walking around the scene of the crime with a worry-less gait. I decided to question him.

"What do you mean by that?"

The bear's grin grew as he looked at me, and he sighed before continuing his tirade. "I'm just saying... You guys have some things wrong about this situation. But it can't be helped... You can't think for yourself and I haven't added these to the rules, so I'll make some things clear." The Headmaster raised a paw as if he intended to count things off from it, but failing to do so due to the apparent fact that he had no fingers. "First off, there won't be any more killings. In any given murder case, a Blackened can only kill three students tops. I mean... it would be bad if there were no limits to the number of people you can kill... if someone decided to kill everyone else, they would win the game without having to go through the Class Trial and that would be booooooring! I will personally make

sure any more murders don't happen, so don't worry your little silly heads about it."

Monobear continued his spiel without interruption. "The second thing I will make clear is this: As of right now, there aren't any more people with my Despair-Syndrome custom strains in this camp. Remember? I said I would cure you all if a killing happened and you guys maintained your end of the bargain. That's why Jackie and the others are without a bracelet too! Those will fall off upon administrating the cure. Good riddance too, for I was getting bored of that disease..."

Monobear ended that in a melancholic tone, but Snotlout immediately picked up on that. "What the hell...? What do you mean you were getting bored?!"

The Headmaster tilted his head as if he didn't understand Snotlout's question. "Huh? I meant what I said. The Despair-Syndrome was getting boring and we didn't need a motive anymore. So I just got rid of it by administering the cure. Simple!"

"But!", interjected Fishlegs, "We just read that the disease was incurable after 6 hours had passed! And that time frame has ended so how did you...?"

"In this land... I can do as I please... for I am Monobear!... Is that a good enough reason for you?", said Monobear in a high-and-mighty tone of voice before erupting in a fit of giggles.

"Obviously not! What kind of rubbish excuse is that?!", yelled Merida as she pointed a finger at the giggling robot. Monobear stopped his laughter, glaring at the red-head with a flashing red eye.

"Hmph! Are you sure you should be wasting your time with me? Your time to investigate for the Class Trial is ticking down, you know?! I just gave you all you needed to know so you can investigate without any worries, so you lot better get on with that, STAT!", and with that demand, Monobear disappeared, leaving us with the usual dazzled and confused state of mind. We all looked at each other with unease before Flynn coughed awkwardly.

"So, shall we get on with the investigation...?"

Rapunzel raised her hand as if she were asking for permission to speak. "But... what should we do about Elsa's missing body?"

"Should we even look for it? We might be missing important clues but we do have limited time...", commented Tooth.

"It cannot be helped. We will look for it as we investigate but we cannot make it our priority. We should, however, guard the other corpses to prevent their loss as well.", added Peter.

"I guess I'll do it.", said Jack as he reluctantly offered his help. "I was out of it because of the stupid disease Monobear gave me, so I don't think I'll be of much help this time around."

"In that case, I'll help Jack and I will guard Anna's body.", said Merida, "I ain't very good at investigatin' to begin with and I was

out of the loop as well."

"I guess that settles it then.", said Tooth as she looked at the two volunteers. "The rest of us will investigate. Please be safe, everyone. Monobear said there won't be any more deaths, but that still doesn't prevent the Blackened from interfering."

"I'd like to see them try anything against all of this!", said Snotlout as he flexed proudly. "Don't worry guys, we will find out who did this. Piece of cake, really!"

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter's reassurance was our signal to scatter and investigate, everyone going to the different parts of the gym in order to find the truth.

"But could we really...?", I thought, but I quickly discarded that state of mind. No, I was definitely going to find out who took our friends' lives away. No matter what happens to me, I will find the truth. Because mutual killing is something... I can't forgive now.

\* \* \*

><p>I guess... I should start with the Monobear File. With a practiced movement I wish I didn't have, I brought up the autopsy report of our victims this time around.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobear File 04<strong>

\*\*Victim(s): Anna of Arendelle, Tuffnut & Ruffnut Thorston, Elsa of Arendelle\*\*

\*\*Cause of death: The victim is showing a bruise on the back of the head matching that of a cylindrical object from a single strike, in addition to a stab wound deep enough to damage the heart. Victim is showing bruise in the back of the head, no additional injuries detected. Victim is showing cracks in back of skull, impact matching that of thick cylindrical object, died an instant death from single hit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...

Huh? Is that... it?

The Monobear file this time around is...

"It seems you have noticed it as well."

Peter's sudden comment made me yelp and jump a little in place. Seriously, this guy has a talent to creep around unnoticed, just like a shadow! I had to take a deep breath to calm down my heart, and then I turned around to face the Ultimate Fear Expert. "If you meant the fact that the Monobear File doesn't mention the time of death nor which victim suffered which wound, then yeah, I noticed it."

Peter made a humming noise as he looked at his own ElectroID. "Yes... the file also neglects to mention the place of death. This is not the first time this has happened though."

"You're right.", the realization hit me. "During the past case, stuff was purposely omitted from the Monobear File..."

"And those missing facts were of vital importance to the Class Trial.", finished Peter, a knowing smile on his face.

"Huh... so this means that this time around as well... those things omitted from the Monobear File will be important.", If that's the case, then we should definitely figure out... The place of death, time of death and the wounds each victim suffered.

"Indeed, so...", said Peter as he walked further into the Combat Room, standing right next to me. "Shall we start investigating here?"

I smiled awkwardly at him, still not completely at ease with his unnerving looks and mannerisms. I also was still miffed about his attitude towards Jack, but he looked like he wanted to help and actually turn over a new leaf, so I nodded at him and then proceeded to look around the place. There was no need to be hostile to him... I'd rather be friends with him than forever be at odds. So, with his help I examined the place where we last saw Elsa's corpse.

...Suffice to say, there wasn't much to look at, save for a puddle of blood. All of the bodies in this case were dipped in the crimson substance, and it was rather distasteful to look at... and yet...

"Hey... Peter, is it me or... compared to the other bodies, doesn't the amount of blood in this place seem \*\*a little lacking\*\* in comparison to the other crime scenes?". Peter fielded my question with a furrowed brow before nodding.

"Yes, now that you mention it... this crime scene is by far the least bloody of the three. Maybe it is like this because of the way Elsa was murdered?", said Peter, looking unsure.

I guess... that's a reasonable conclusion. Still... "Even if that is the case, we still don't know how Elsa was actually killed. The Monobear File doesn't specify and now that her body is gone, we won't know at all."

Peter nodded. "That must have been the Blackened's intent. Trying to obfuscate the truth. They even went as far as to \*\*take her Monobear Bracelet\*\*... Such thoroughness must be praised."

I... am not so sure praising the Blackened is a sensible thing to do, but I held my tongue because in the midst of the puddle of blood, something caught my eye. Something shiny... I carefully picked up the object from and it turned out to be... "Huh...? What is... \*\*aluminum foil\*\* doing in a place like this?" It wasn't a particularly large amount of it, but the piece was substantial enough to wrap your whole arm with it. Not that I did that in actuality, as the aluminum was soaked in blood, so it was just an educated guess... and yet...



"If it was here, then it should have something to do with the murder... as for what it has to do with it, I do not have the faintest.", added Peter. And I had to agree. It may seem useless right now, but we can't just dismiss the possibility that the Blackened used this to execute its crime. Making a mental note on this, I proceeded to check the rest of the Combat Room for more clues.

Something that caught my attention as Peter and I walked around the room was the Freezer the Twins had mentioned. Thinking that a clue could be hidden inside, I approached when I noticed right away that something was wrong. The door to it was **\*\*freezing over\*\***, icicles visible on the hinges of the door, and one of them was **\*\*visibly missing a big chunk,\*\*** as if it were snapped off. Sure enough, when I tried to pull on the door's handle, it didn't even budge. I didn't even bring an eHandbook with me, so I couldn't try to unlock it using the panel next to the door, but upon looking at that contraption, I knew why the door was freezing over.

"W-who would set this thing to -20 degrees?!"

There was no mistake, someone had messed with the Freezer's external settings. The question is... why? What did the killer have in mind when he this? Sure, hiding Elsa's body had an obvious motive behind it, but this and the aluminum foil? I couldn't understand the why behind them.

"Did you find anything else, Haddock?"

Peter's sudden comment caught my attention. I shook my head. "Nothing especially significant. How about you?"

Judging by his grimace, I could tell nothing else of interest was found. Peter looked at the frozen over door with a thoughtful glance before speaking up. "I suppose this is all we will find in this room. Shall we move on, then?"

I nodded towards the Ultimate Fear Expert. There really wasn't much to investigate here on the grounds that a body was missing, so we left the room. We had a lot to cover before the Class Trial started.

\* \* \*

><p>I was wondering how we were going to investigate the rest of the rooms if we didn't have the eHandbooks to access all the rooms, but the answer to that came to us in the shape of a certain Headmaster. He was looking rather pleased with himself as he spoke to us.<p>

"For this investigation, I've unlocked all doors in this complex, so you can look around to your heart's content!"

Monobear's boisterous claim was met by Peter's suspicious glare.

"Oh? And to what do we owe such magnanimous action?", asked the raven-haired teen, matching my suspicions of the bear. Monobear simply smiled innocently as he put a paw behind his head.

"Why, to nothing! I'm just such a thoughtful and kind Headmaster... I couldn't bear it if you guys started to complain about the fact that you can't access the crime scenes with ease, so I've done away with the whole system!"

The Headmaster let his head fall with a dejected nature, mumbling. "Also... **\*\*I'm missing all my eHandbooks \*\***so even if you asked me for one, I couldn't give you one..."

At that, my train of thought stopped in its tracks. "What do you mean... you're missing all of them?" Does this mean... he loaned them all before the incident... and he hasn't gotten them back?

"Ack! You heard that whispering of mine? You might as well be the Ultimate Eavesdropper, Hiccy!", yelled Monobear, flustered. What the hell... You were whispering that so loud, there's no way you didn't intend for me to hear it. Peter fielded Monobear's outburst.

"Hmm... if you say you are missing **\*\*all\*\*** of your eHandbooks... does this also include the VIP eHandbook?". At Peter's query, Monobear resumed a stoic expression before speaking.

"Hmm... whether I lost that one or not... is something you'll have to debate for yourself! There's no way I'm giving you a hint this time!" And with that carefree remark, Monobear disappeared, not really answering or question. The fact that he dodged the question must mean... that the issue of the VIP eHandbook will be important to the Class Trial. We didn't really have much to do standing right there, so I...

I got a deep breath and steeled myself as Peter and I walked towards the Reception Desk Area, where the mood makers of the group laid slain.

The smell of iron and death was strong as I reached the scene of the crime. It was with difficulty that I looked at the corpses of Ruff and Tuff. It really broke my heart, seeing these objects resembling my friends but that they definitely weren't them anymore. Devoid of any energy and mischief, and smeared in their own blood... it was such a grisly and depressing sight I couldn't help but to feel a knot in my throat. All these killings and unnecessary deaths that were costing us our friends... I wanted them to end... but for now, I had to focus on the investigation.

Fishlegs and Jack were there, looking around the area but obviously staying away from the corpse. Despite his size, I had already learned Fishlegs was a very sensitive and gentle person, and no doubt the prospect of poking around dead bodies was mortifying to him. I... didn't really liked it either, neither when I helped out in Berk or here... but I had to do it. So with hesitation in my steps, I ignored Jack's groan as I kneeled next to the Twins' body, trying to avoid the mass of blood gathered around the bodies.

I didn't have to look too closely to their heads to realize that the fatal blow had been dealt there; their blonde hair was completely drenched in their own blood, and both of their skulls had been completely caved in. There was no doubt about it... Wounds like these could be used to match them with the victims mentioned in the Monobear File.

"T-they were most likely killed with... that."

Fishlegs' nervous voice directed me towards the back of the desk, near a tipped over rolling chair. There it laid, a silver metal bat, its shiny metallic surface smeared with blood on both sides. I had to agree with Fishlegs. "I get it... yeah, this is most likely the murder weapon."

"A metal bat...? How pedestrian and inelegant...", commented Peter, but I honestly didn't have the energy to comment on the fact that killing was already pretty ornery. Instead, I decided to focus on the weapon itself. I don't know why it bothered me... but the surface of the bat was stained in two opposite sides of it... Had the Blackened hit them more than one time...?

It was food for thought, but for now, I could conclude that this was the definite murder weapon, so I decided to move on.

Next to the Twins were their Monobear Bracelets, completely smeared in blood. That wasn't out of the ordinary. But it was nice to see that the killer hadn't tampered with the crime scene on this occasion. Not that they could have done so... we were all in the vicinity of the reception desk so they couldn't have gotten close to the corpse. With that out of the way, I proceeded my search.

Fishlegs couldn't take it anymore as I started to feel through the Twins' corpses and left hurriedly, presumably to get some air. Jack didn't even snicker at that reaction, and I felt bad for the Ultimate Encyclopedia. Right away I found some odd dots in the Twins' wrists; they looked like recent scars. Setting those aside, It didn't take me long to find something of interest in Tuffnut's jean pocket.

"Isn't this...?"

A familiar object. An eHandbook. So, Monobear had indeed lent them all out before the incident happened... But... why would the Twins have one? Had they come to the Gym and had been ambushed by the Blackened...? A search on Ruffnut's jean pocket revealed another eHandbook, which further confused me. What was going on here...?

"Oh... so then this registry is correct..."

Jack's comment caught my attention, and I stood up to face the white haired teen, who was holding the clipboard Monobear had forced us to use whenever we wanted to borrow an eHandbook. "What do you mean, Jack?"

He passed me the clipboard with a conflicted shrug, and I began to read the details on it, Peter easily looking over my shoulder to get a look at it.

**\*\*Monobuff Gym eHandbook Loan Registry\*\***

**\*\* - THE Snotlout - Heavy Lifting Room\*\***

**\*\* - Elsa - Combat Room\*\***

**\*\* - TUFF - Olympic Pool Room\*\***

**\*\* - RUFF - Combat Room \*\***

**\*\* - Anna Arendelle - Olympic Pool Room \*\***

**\*\* - REA - VIP \*\***

As I read it, I could see what Jack was referring to. This explained quite clearly who had borrowed the eHandbooks, and why the Twins had some on them. But that didn't explain the motivation behind borrowing them. Why did any of these people decide to come here in the first place?

"I see... so the airheads borrowed the eHandbooks... that explains why they had some on them.", said Peter.

"Yeah, but that's not what's bothering me...", said Jack as he took away the board and looked it over with a scrunched up face. "What's bothering me is... who is this REA...?"

"That's a good question...", I answered as I tried to think who it was. No one in this Camp was named like that. Still... the fact that they had deliberately tried to conceal their identity was highly suspicious. Could they be...?

"Man, I'm not good at this stuff!", groaned Jack. "I mean, sure, I can figure some things out but this? This is weird mystery bullshit."

Peter chuckled as a smile played on my lips. "Yes, we can see that.", the fact that we had answered that in unison was almost as hilarious as the expression Jack gave us when he heard us talk at the same time. "If you're done being the creepy duo of ganging up against moi, how about you smartasses find a new useful clue or something?"

Jack's indignant (and cute i mean yes ahem) mini-tantrum was met by Peter's cool retort. "In actuality, this clipboard is a valuable asset. With this, we can surmise the victim's whereabouts and actions and we can use this to inquire everyone's alibi during the time of the incident."

That was true. This clipboard could be vital on figuring out what actually transpired that night. "I guess we should ask everyone what they were doing on the time of the incident..."

"Cool, I'll leave that to you two, while I'm on corpse-guarding duty.", said Jack with a dejected tone to his voice. I nodded at him and having finished our sleuthing around the area, both Peter and I decided to leave when I was stopped by Jack's grip on my wrist. I turned to face the pale teen with a questioning glance, but I immediately softened my expression when I saw the sullen look on his face. "Err... Jack, what's wrong...?"

The Ultimate Mystery bit his lip, hesitating, before answering. "After you're done investigating... can we talk?", he eyed Peter before continuing, "Privately? There's something I want to tell you... I... I remembered something... and I think it's important."

That got my attention. "Yes, absolutely, Jack. I'll listen to you right now, even! I-I mean, if you want to.". I knew Jack's memory loss was important and I genuinely cared about it, but the white haired teen smiled with clear relief before shaking his head and letting my arm go. "Nah, it's OK, Hic. Really. We have to focus on this deal right now but...", his smile got brighter as he finished talking, "Thanks."

I wish I didn't blush so easily, especially in this situation, but his smile was so handsome, it made me momentarily forget all the despair surrounding us. Still, he was right about having to focus, and focus I did. With another clumsy nod of the head, I went back to Peter, who was eyeing us with a weird fascination, and we left towards the place of Anna's death. And as I did, I swore I could feel Jack's gaze on my back.

\* \* \*

><p>With great difficulty, I entered the Olympic Pool Room, where Anna's corpse was. It was a ghastly sight, no matter how you saw it. A broken figure, devoid of any of the energy and saccharine happiness that I had associated with her. The pang of guilty struck me once again as I remembered I never got to apologize for hurting her feelings. I never got the opportunity. With a lump in my throat, I vowed right there that I would at least, find out the truth behind her death. Not only to kind of atone for what I did, but out of necessity as well. The whole "you'll-die-if-you-don't-figure-this-out" deal is a good motivator.<p>

Merida was looking at the Ultimate Hiker with a grim look, and raised her head to see us as we entered the room, wiping away a single tear to hide her crying. "Heh, guess the after-effects of that darn sickness are still on me. I'm leakin' all over the place aren't I...?"

I gave her a sheepish smile. "Ah... don't worry... I won't tell anyone you were crying so, um... carry on?" Merida gave me a disbelieving look, before looking at Anna's body once again.

"I just wished I could have done somethin' to prevent this. This is all like the 'Protect Hiccup Squad' back when this nightmare started... All was for nothin', huh?"

Merida had every right to feel sad about this. But in this place where our wills were being bent by someone who was most likely insane, she wasn't at fault. Before I could say some words of encouragement, Peter intervened.

"Instead of lamenting your failures, how about you start to move on and help us with the investigation? I can guarantee that will be of more help than wallowing in self-misery, Miss DunBronch."

I winced internally at Peter's comment. He wasn't wrong, but it still felt like a harsh thing to say. Luckily, Merida didn't knock his lights out and took the jab as well as you'd expect. Or as I hoped. "Ya don't have to tell me what I already know, Pitch. That's why I am doin' my part and keepin' creeps like you away from her."

Her glare told me she wasn't kidding about not letting Peter near. I

guess this was her way of getting back at the Ultimate Fear Expert? There was no way I was going to comment on how childish that was, but it seemed like Peter understood she wasn't kidding, so he looked at me with a weird smirk. "Well, you heard her, Haddock. Please investigate the scene of the crime for us both. Not that I have any... doubts on your abilities, but yes... indeed..."

"Fine, whatever, I got this. Sort of.", I said as I walked away from the black-haired teen. I know he was making fun of me with that sentence, sort of. Not that I wasn't going to give investigating my all in the first place.

I approached Anna's body and I kneeled to get a closer look. Just like the other corpses I had seen, Anna's body was drenched in her own blood and she too had been freed from her Monobear Bracelet. However, while the back of her head was definitely bleeding, that was not where most of the blood was coming from. A noticeable stab wound was visible on her chest, and the blood was most definitely coming from there. However, despite the amount of blood around her, her Monobear Bracelet was **\*\*far more cleaner\*\*** than the Twins'. On top of that, there wasn't any visible **\*\*weapons\*\*** around the area that could cause the stab wound or the bruise on her back of the head. How could that be?

"Ugh I wish Monobear kept this place more cleaner.", complained Merida as she looked at the floor in front of her with disdain.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I get this place is a pool room and its supposed to be all wet and stuff, but Monobear should really dry this place properly! There was this giant puddle of water near Anna's... and I almost slipped and cracked my behind!", answered Merida. As I looked at the point she was glaring at, I saw it too. That was definitely a preposterous **\*\*amount of water on the floor\*\***. What was the meaning of this? Had someone, perhaps the Blackened, taken a dip for some reason and splashed water on the floor? But why? These oddities in the crime scene didn't explain anything but they were noteworthy.

"There was also this pieces of papers nearby 'er, all crumpled up...", interjected Merida, "but it's all nonsense to me... can ya make heads or tails out of this, Hiccup?"

The wrinkled up sheets of papers were small and one of them had only a list on it, the other more concrete text. That much was visible as the Ultimate Archer passed them on to me. As I read the list-looking one, I also understood Merida's confusion.

**\*\*Get rid of target\*\***

**\*\*Deliver goods to CR\*\***

**\*\*Wait on lobby for more instructions.\*\***

My confusion on high gear, I turned to the other paper, hoping that there would be a clue to the nature of the first note. What I read only confused me further.

**\*\*Please come to the Olympic Pool Room at 4 AM. We have to talk about**

something, make sure no one follows you.\*\*

Merida and Peter saw my confused expression, with the redhead tilting her head. "I know, those notes ain't makin' any sense to me. What do you think this means?"

"I do not know what they really mean, but one thing is clear: Whoever received these notes were manipulated to come here.", theorized Peter.

"You said you found these here, right, Merida?", I asked the redhead, to which she nodded and answered. "Ya, I did. The list was crumpled up and was near the door, and the list was just sitting a few paces away from Anna."

"Then, did Anna follow the instructions of these notes, or...?". I asked out loud to no one in particular, just thinking. Something about the notes was off. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but they seemed to kinda contradict themselves. Still, there was no doubt these notes were important, so I held on to them.

After taking a last sweep around the area, we left Merida to her guarding job, not before receiving some motivation in the form of "Ya better find out who the killer is with these clues I gave ya or else!"

I neglected to mention the fact that she didn't have to threaten me, for if we failed we were going to die, but I promised I would with a shaky smile.

\* \* \*

><p>"I know why you're here."<p>

The instant accusatory claim from Snotlout as we stepped in the Heavylifting Room caught us by surprise. I actually leaned back a little as I saw the indignant look on the Ultimate Heavy Lifter. I knew by now that I didn't have to do much against Snotlout to get him angry at me, but this time I was genuinely unsure of what I had done.

"Err, what do you mean?", I asked as I shared a confused glance with Peter, who shrugged back at me almost indescriptively.

"Don't play dumb, fishbone.", Snotlout continued as he crossed his arms. "I know you think I'm the most likely suspect on this. Hell, I bet all of you idiots think I'm the Blackened! But I'm not, I swear!", finished the burly teen, shouting the last part as he raised his arms high in the air to emphasize his point.

At that, I remembered the events of last night. "Oh yeaaaah... didn't you say you were going to work out here at 10 PM?"

"Have you been here ever since?", asked Peter, to which Snotlout grunted.

"Yeah, I actually was here until the first Body Discovery Announcement played..."

Huh. Talk about a bad coincidence. Still, I don't know why, but I

don't believe Snotlout is the culprit... and yet, the fact that he was here during the whole incident... "Say, did you hear or see anything while you were here Snotlout? Anything you may have witnessed could be decisive!"

At that, Snotlout scrunched up his nose with the effort of thinking, before shaking his head in denial. "Nah, the rooms in this gym are the same as our rooms in our cottages; soundproof as hell. The only reason I even knew about Anna's... about the corpse was because I decided to continue my workout with a swimming session. I exited this room and by chance I looked at the room next to this and found the door open." At this point of recollection, he paled a little. "And then I peered in and you know the rest...", he then gave me a wary look after pausing a little. "So, you really think I'm the killer?"

That question caught me off guard, as I was deep in thought about his testimony. "Nah, I don't think so, Snotlout. In fact, I'm beginning to think... that the timing of this crime coincides with your proposal of working out way too conveniently."

Peter nodded. "Why yes, I also find the timing of the crime too convenient. For the record, I do not suspect you, Mr. Jorgenson. This crime is far too complicated to be planned by you.", finished the Ultimate Fear Expert with a mocking grin. Honestly, I don't see why Jack and Pitch don't get along. Those kinds of remarks...!

"Hmph. Whatever. As long as no one thinks I'm the culprit all is fucking fine.", said Snotlout, glaring at the black-haired teen.

If Snotlout's claim is true, then we have his movements accounted for, but... this doesn't really help us figure out who the criminal is. All of us, sans the sick, knew that Snotlout was going to come here. Still, I'll keep his testimony in mind.

After being told that he hadn't found anything else of use in the room, we moved on to another room.

\* \* \*

><p>In the Aerobics Room, we found Tooth. However, she wasn't doing much as she sat on the floor, legs crossed, staring at particularly nothing. When she heard us enter, she turned to see us and I could see she wasn't taking this situation well. I guess she felt guilty about the fact that she had taken a nap while all of this had happened. I didn't blame her, though. All of us that were supposed to be taking care of the patients fell asleep on the job. We were all at fault.<p>

The Ultimate Dentist, however, didn't bring the reason behind her sadness up, and I didn't comment on it either. Instead, the rainbow-colored girl gave us a shaky smile. "Hey, how's the investigation going?"

Peter hummed a little before answering. "I like to believe it is going well. We are finding a rather sizable number of clues, but..."

"I still don't know how we're going to find the killer with all of this. The killer even tampered with the evidence this time, so we are



missing things...", I said, trying to not sound whiny. "There could have been clues in Elsa's body or bracelet... I mean, that's why the killer took them, no?"

At that, Tooth tilted her head. "I guess that makes sense... I mean, I would also love to get my hands on the Monobear Bracelet... they're fascinating pieces of technology."

"Okaaaay, I'll ignore how close you were to fangirling over something Monobear made and go straight to the point where I ask you: why do you think that?", I said, being a little put off by the sparkle in the Ultimate Dentist's eyes.

"Oh. Right. Sorry about that.", she said, blushing and coughing a little. "But I can't help but to be fascinated by them! They must be highly sensitive pieces of technology if they're able to pick up the human heartbeat!"

"What... are you talking about?", asked Peter, and at that, Tooth only grew more excitable, completely at odds with her previous mood.

"Well, you know how Monobear said that the only way to remove the bracelet was when someone killed or when someone died?", she asked and we nodded. "Well, I was thinking... if the bracelets are supposed to fall off when someone dies automatically, wouldn't it mean they are \*\*capable of sensing a person's heartbeat\*\*? And if they pop off right at that moment... then the bracelet's sensors should be highly efficient!"

"Huh... so the bracelets are kinda like those heart rate monitors in hospitals? I find it hard to believe Monobear made those by himself...". It was kind of neat, I had to admit. I wanted to get one and open it up but this was probably not the best time to say that.

We kinda chatted more about the technology of the bracelets than we should have, and we only stopped when Peter remarked that we should continue our investigation. With nothing more to add, we left Tooth and moved on to the next location, and the last room in this gym.

\* \* \*

><p>Not surprisingly, we found Rapunzel and Flynn in the Obstacle Course Room. However, it was obvious that something was up the moment we walked in. There was simply no other way to describe the scene in front of us: Rapunzel happily clapping towards a Flynn that was obviously proud of himself about... something. His smirk grew more when he saw us enter, and I think he was actually sticking his chest out at us. Rapunzel, however, stopped clapping and immediately greeted us with that cheerful disposition of hers.<p>

"Hey guys!"

I waved awkwardly at the duo. "Hey there... uh, what's going on here?"

The Ultimate Painter moved out of Flynn's way and pointed at the Ultimate Thief with a sunny smile. "Oh, guys! Guys! Flynn here found something amazing!"

Peter and I shared a look before returning our stares at Flynn, who chuckled a little before producing something behind his back, his motions dramatic as he spun the thing he was hiding in his finger. "Take a load of this, guys!"

Once he stopped spinning the thing around, I got a good look at it and- "Is that a Monobear Bracelet?!"

The bracelet was smeared with lots of blood, but it was definitely one. Flynn's confident nod confirmed this fact. "Yup! I wager this was Elsa's missing bracelet, too!". I had to agree with the brown-haired teen. There was only one unaccounted bracelet in this case, and that was Elsa's.

"Where did you find that?", asked Peter, his eyes narrowed at the pair. Flynn saw that suspicious look and immediately put his hands up.

"Hey, don't be like that! Me and Punzie just found it when we entered this room! It was sitting there in the middle of the floor! Right?", and as he said that, he faced the blonde, who nodded eagerly. "I swear, we weren't hiding this or anything! So don't give me that look, mister."

That was... odd. How did the bracelet end here? I thought the killer had took it with him, along with Elsa's body. Had the Blackened dropped it in his escape...?

"I... see.", and with that, Peter backed off, though he still looked troubled for a reason.

"It's such good luck that you guys found t-that clue, though!", I said, trying to diffuse the awkward atmosphere. "I-I was afraid we would miss some things in this murder spree of a case, but at least you guys managed to find something that the killer hid, so nice job!"

"That's what I don't get, though...", said Rapunzel, and at her words, all of us stared at her. "I mean, sure, I get why the killer needed to dispose of evidence... but what I don't get is... why kill all those people?"

...

"Now that you mention it... That's a very good question, Punzie.", I said. The more I thought about it, the more I wondered the same as the Ultimate Painter. Why kill so many people? "I mean, killing one person is already risky... but killing four? That would be incredibly difficult to cover up. So why...?"

"Maybe the bastard simply liked the feeling of murder and went on a spree?", suggested Flynn. I sincerely... doubt that. This crime was premeditated, not a spur of the moment thing, most likely. So, why did the killer plan to kill so many people...? Why...?

\*\*\*Ding dong ding dong\*\*\*

A familiar sound of static filled the room as a nearby monitor lit up, showing off a Monobear finishing a cup of lemonade in one swig.

The plush menace cleaned his snout with a swift motion and threw the glass behind him, before looking towards the camera with a bored expression.

"So like, um... this chapter is already getting extremely long and I must oblige to the audience's whims. So! Let's wrap up this investigation, shall we? I'll see you all in Monobear Tower for the long awaited Class Trial! It's gonna be a blast, so don't miss it! Not that you can... puhuhuhu!"

With that taunting farewell, the monitor turned off and that feeling of trepidation filled me once again. We all looked at each other; there were no words to be exchanged. We could all see what we were feeling right there, right now. A shared feeling of nervousness, fear, and resolve. It was in that shared knowledge that we left the room, and then joined the others as we went towards the clearing that housed the tower that would decide our destiny.

\* \* \*

><p>In the end, no one found Elsa's body, but we did all we could. Hoping that we hadn't missed anything of vital importance, we all gathered in front of Monobear Tower.<p>

As I watched everyone else enter the gaping maw that was the door of Monobear Tower's elevator, Jack approached me from behind, looking jumpy and nervous. I held his hand in an effort to calm him down, and though he stopped fidgeting, I could still tell he was worried about something; his eyes, darting from here to there, sold him out.

Before I could ask what was wrong, he spoke. "H-hey, Hic... about that thing I told you before..."

At once, I knew what he was referring to. "Are you ready to talk about it...?", I asked, trying to make sure he knew I wouldn't pressure him to tell me. The white haired teen nodded, and without warning, began narrating his bizarre dream.

When he finished, he seemed like he had woken up from a dream, his eyes looking a bit dazed. I too felt like I had entered a dream. When I heard his tale, it all sounded so surreal. I mean, hearing about a more adult version of me that was supposedly on a mission by Hope's Peak, because of my talent? My talent was not real, it was something selected by a raffle... so that was pretty odd by itself.

And hearing that Toothless was still alive during that time hurt me like a stab to the heart, the wounds left by his death still not healed.

And to top it all, Jack and I had been in a relationship during our years in Hope's Peak. Or was it Jackson? That part was confusing me a lot and making me uneasy... but no doubt it was affecting the white-haired teen the most. After all, this "dream" had presented itself to Jack as another memory from our lost years of Hope's Peak. What was going on with him...?

No, I should worry about that later. What Jack needs right now... is assurance that the person he is right now is what matters. I squeeze his hand and that is enough to snap him out of his stupor, giving me

an unsure look. I smile awkwardly at him, before speaking. "I-I guess that means we were always meant to be...? I mean, even in our past we were already together..."

"I wonder... Heh...", Jack laughed bitterly, "I don't even know what to think anymore. I don't even know who I am or who I was or who I thought I was or am and-". He didn't finished his sentence, giving up out of sheer frustration and confusion.

"Jack...", I tried, but he shook his head.

"Forget it Hic... It doesn't matter right now.", the white haired teen looked at the open doors of the elevator. "We need to first survive this. I'll... I'll think about this more later."

I didn't want to drop this with Jack's state of mind like this, but he was right. Still, as he tried to walk away from me and enter the elevator by himself, I gripped my hand hard on his, earning me a look of confusion from the pale teen. "Right. We'll... survive this together. And we'll think about this. Together."

I wasn't one to be assertive like this, normally. But I wasn't going to let Jack think that he was alone in this. He had supported me so much, it was time to give back. The teary-eyed smile Jack gave me before we started to walk towards the elevator only fueled my convictions. We were going to survive. We were going to find out the truth.

The doors closed behind us as soon as we stepped in the elevator, and the contraption began its ascent. It was always a long and silent ride whenever we were forced to come here, but this time around...

"Oi... isn't this ride takin' far more time than usual?", asked Merida.

"Yeah... I wonder... are we actually going farther and farther up every time we do one of these trials?", wondered Flynn out loud.

"I wonder if we'll reach the top eventually? I want to see high this tower really is!", said Rapunzel, excited.

"I-I'd rather not. I'm not bad with heights, but even I have a limit!", said Fishlegs.

My thoughts were abuzz with the current topic and the story that Jack had told me. It was still hard to believe, the fact that we had actually gone to Hope's Peak Academy and had lost our memories because of Monobear. I didn't doubt Jack's recollection as they matched the accounts we had dug up recently, but that still left some doubts... if we aged just like Jack said, then why did I look exactly as I remember? As a 15 year old fishbone...?

The mystery pile kept getting taller the more we learned, just like how this tower continued to stretch up into the sky.

Would we ever reach the top of this pile, and find out the truth? All we could do for now was survive.

And thus, our ascent continued. Higher, and higher, without stopping,

the elevator not making any sound as it continued to climb floor after countless floors.

Until, with a ding, it stopped, and its doors opened to the courtroom. This time around, the courtroom was designed with an iced-over motif, the metallic walls covered up with a layer of frost and icicles. A chilly air filled the courtroom, and in the center of the circle formed by the stands we occupied was a heater. As expected, more signs signaling our departed friends had been added, taking the place they usually occupied, their pictures crossed over with a crude pink X. I hadn't noticed until now... but a lot of signs were standing where our friends used to be.

"Welcome! Come in, come in and chill!", said Monobear, scaring my wits out of me. The Headmaster this time was clad in an eskimo coat, completely unnecessary due to the fact that he was a plush toy. "I was expecting a bigger group, but oh well... what can a bear do? Young people these days are so violent and eager to kill each other... Ohohohoho!"

I swallowed a bitter remark and proceeded to take my usual stand, as everyone else did. Whatever Monobear had said, it ringed true, though. Of our original sixteen student group... we already had lost seven students and Toothless.

We had lost four people in this incident... all because someone was desperate enough to escape. There was no way... we could let that go.

"Now then, let's get fired up for the third Class Trial!"

Monobear's voice bellowed through the courtroom as he took a seat on his throne. There was no turning back. No moment to hesitate. Another trial was starting right now. Another game of believing and betraying. Of truth and lies. Of black and white.

Of hope and despair.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Yep, just a single chapter for the investigation segment. It was rather hefty, I think, and it contains enough clues, I think, for you to theorize on the nature of the criminal.<strong>

\*\*Next comes the Class Trial. I really hope I am able to deliver the third time around... my draft for the chapter is an absolute mess. I don't even know if this trial will be longer than the rest or not. We'll see.\*\*

\*\*In any case, see ya next time. \*goes back to answering reviews and trying to write something sensible\*\*\*

### 33. 3 - Chapter 3 - Class Trial A

\*\*Chapter 3 - Despair-Syndrome - Class Trial A\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>A brief foreword, if you will.<strong>

**\*\*Now, as you may have noticed by the title, this is part one of the Class Trial chapter. If you read the note before this chapter (That will no longer exist as soon as this chapter goes up), this will come up not as a surprise, but as something expected. To summarize that note, in order to apologize for the lack of updates, and to wet your appetites, I decided to split the Class Trial chapter that was traditionally uploaded as one, into two.\*\***

**\*\*I'm sorry for those that wanted the entire chapter, but because I lost it due to computer failure, I have to rewrite the entire thing and I don't want to leave you guys hanging for another month without notice. So without further ado, enjoy the first half of this chapter.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

"\*Ahem\*, Let's begin with a simple explanation of the Class Trial!", declared Monobear in that mirthful, annoyingly chipper voice of his.

This being the third Class Trial, we were already familiar with the rules governing it, and yet Monobear still deemed it necessary for us to go through this again and again. Well, it's not like we can do anything to expedite the process, so all we can do is wait for the Headmaster to finish his usual spiel.

...

Silence. No more words come out of the Headmaster's stuffed mouth. Confused, all of us stare at the throne the Headmaster is occupying, its golden surface showing signs of frost. And there he is, looking sad and forlorn.

"Hey, the fuck is wrong?", asks Snotlout, voicing our collective concern. With a sigh, the Headmaster lifts his head slowly, his stuffed face somehow being able to convey a sense of dismay.

"Well... you know... This whole Class Trial and murder scenario... and heck, even the motive... I felt like I've done this before, y'know? I'm having this whole deja vu feeling and its seriously bringing down my mood...", Monobear sighed even more, "Is this it...? Is this the limit of my potential? Am I doomed to repeat my past victories over and over...? It feels bad, you guys..."

"Uh, who honestly cares?", answers Flynn, and I find myself agreeing with him. "Just get the whole thing you start with over and done with so we can start this ghastly business."

At that, Monobear perked up. Or rather, flared up, his factions showing anger, limbs flailing around with cartoony rage. "Geez! Kids these days are so rude! I should've brought my big Discipline Stick to show you how to respect your elders!"

...What the...?

"Anyways! Just start already! You guys know the rules of the Class

Trial by now so get on with it before I freeze over and become the most adorabloodthirsty popsicle in the universe!", demanded Monobear.

"There's no way you would ever be described as cute...", mumbled Merida.

"Anyways!", spoke up Tooth, drawing our attention. "It is a little cold here, so let's begin discussing! What do we start with?"

"Well...", said Jack, looking uncharacteristically bashful as he spoke. "I would actually like to have a summary of the whole deal. Since Merida and me were out cold due to the disease, I kinda... don't know what is going on. Especially since we didn't do that much investigating because we were in guard duty."

Oh yeah... that IS true...

"T-then... allow me to describe the events, OK?", offered Fishlegs. After nodding at him to start, the beefy boy cleared up his throat and launched on with his summary.

"Well, I'll begin by recounting the events from the night before the murder. B-basically... We all parted ways from the hospital after Snotlout stated that he was going to work out. After that... if I remember correctly... The only ones that stayed in the hospital were Hiccup, Rapunzel, Tooth and the ill: Jack, Merida and the Twins. From what I gathered, Hiccup, Rapunzel and Tooth were tired from taking care of the sick and took a nap. When they woke up, they realized the Twins were missing and immediately set off to search for them. As they were searching for them, a Body Discovery Announcement was made."

"Yeah, I remember that waking me up. It was certainly a rude awakening...", commented Flynn.

Fishlegs continued on. "We learned from that Body Discovery Announcement that a murder had happened in the Gym. From what I learned, Hiccup was the first one to arrive... but he wasn't the one who triggered the alarm... It was actually Snotlout. Those two... discovered that Anna had been killed in the Olympic Pool Room. After that... all of us gathered at the Gym's Lobby and we divided up in order to search the facility for the body... and that's where Hiccup, Flynn and I found the T-Twins' dead bodies...", Fishlegs gulped, his voice quivering with nervous. "And right after that, the others... found Elsa's body. Soon enough, \*\*a body discovery announcement was effectuated for both of them\*\*... And that's basically all that happened."

I played Fishleg's summary over in my mind and I couldn't find anything wrong with it. That... was pretty much what happened. Jack and Merida seemed deep in thought, both of them looking pretty committed to memorizing these events. I guess it really bothered them that they had missed everything.

"I get it now... Thanks Fish!"

"Yah... I think I understand what's happenin' now. Got it all stored in my noggin'."

"Good, now that that is out of the way...", said Peter, looking mildly annoyed, "We should really start with the debate. Enough with this inane prattling."

"Whoa there buddy. A little hasty aren't we?", said Jack, "We don't even know where to begin with!"

"Well, from what we just heard from Fishlegs... I guess we can start with the most suspicious things, right?", asked Flynn, "And to me, the most suspicious thing is one very suspicious person!"

"What are you talking about?", asked Rapunzel to the Ultimate Thief. I swear Flynn's grin gets bigger whenever Rapunzel pays attention to him. Was I... that obvious with my crush on Jack?

"Well, there was one person in the same place that those people died, right? Even before all of us arrived there... and that is extremely suspicious!", declared Flynn, looking very confident.

"Oh, stop bein' a showpony and just get to the point!", demanded Merida.

"Alright! All I'm sayin'... saying! Is that the most suspicious person is... Snotlout! Don't you think that makes him the most likely suspect?!", said Flynn.

"What?! It's Voting Time already?", said Monobear in mock shock.

"W-what?! No, fuck that! I'm not the killer!", objected Snotlout, acting accordingly to the accusation.

"C'mon! There's no need to drag this out! You're the **\*\*only one who was there\*\*** in the Gym aside from the victims, so you have to be the killer! You even said you would kill any of us with ease! So fess up!", shouted Flynn.

"S-shut up! I'll fucking kill you if you keep making shit up!", shot back Snotlout, not really helping his case.

But somehow... I agreed with Snotlout. This... just seemed so obvious. Like a set-up. I found it hard to believe he really was the killer. But hunches weren't any good. I had to prove to them that Snotlout couldn't have killed Anna. And I think... I may have just the thing. Because... **\*\*it was impossible for Snotlout to even get in the Olympic Pool Room.\*\***

"Sorry, Flynn... but I'm afraid Snotlout is correct. I... don't really think he's the killer.", I spoke up, obviously getting his attention. Man, why am I always in the receiving end of angry glares? I'm trying to save our lives here...

"Wha-? What are you even saying, kiddo?", asked Flynn, showcasing that angry glare I mentioned before.

"Well... just think about this... where was Anna killed?", I began with a leading question.

"Huh? Well, she was killed in the Olympic Pool Room, duh! Don't ask



stupid questions!", answered Flynn, looking exasperated.

...Rude... Anyways...

"So naturally, that means the killer had to have had access to the Olympic Pool Room like her, in order to be able to get to her, no?", I continued on, hoping it would begin to dawn on him.

"Again with the stupid questions... Yeah, it's obvious that's what happened!", spat out the Ultimate Thief, still unable to see the problem with his assertion.

"But that's **\*\*impossible\*\***. Snotlout didn't have access to the Olympic Pool Room... and the thing that proves that is the **\*\*Monobuff Gym Loan Registry\*\***", I finished, hoping that he would finally get it.

"Ohhhh! I see what Hiccup is talking about!", said Tooth, comprehension in her purple eyes shining through. "Remember, you guys! If anyone wants to enter any room in the Gym, they have to ask Monobear for an eHandbook and **\*\*write their name or something related to them\*\*** in the Loan Registry!"

"Right... and if I remember correctly...", began Fishlegs, recounting the contents of the Loan Registry to us:

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobuff Gym eHandbook Loan Registry:<strong>

**\*\* - THE Snotlout - Heavy Lifting Room\*\***

**\*\* - Elsa - Combat Room\*\***

**\*\* - TUFF - Olympic Pool Room\*\***

**\*\* - RUFF - Combat Room\*\***

**\*\* - Anna Arendelle - Olympic Pool Room\*\***

**\*\* - REA - VIP\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>"There it is.", I spoke up, facing Flynn. "Do you see it? Snotlout only had access to one room, and one room only. And that was the Heavy Lifting Room!"<p>

Flynn was struck speechless, his theory crumbling in his face.

"So... Snotlout isn't really the killer?", asked Merida to all of us.

"Of course I am not the killer!", answered Snotlout, positively fuming, "Really, you make one threat to someone's life just once and everyone assumes you're the murderer every time someone fucking dies..."

"Really, it was foolish to think that Jorgenson was the Blackened",

said Peter with a bored expression. "He is far too dumb for a scheme like this. We just ended up wasting time on this because someone couldn't help but to jump to conclusions..."

"S-shut up... freak...", mumbled Flynn, looking away, clearly embarrassed by his blunder.

"A-anyways...", said Rapunzel, looking apologetic, "We should probably... move on to something else."

"But where do we even start?", asked Jack, "From what you guys told me... this seems like a very complicated case. I mean, we have to figure out who killed these four people and the mysteries behind their deaths!"

"Yeah, even my head is starting to hurt from considering everything.", said Fishlegs, holding his head. "There's so many weird things in this killing spree... I wonder if we can even solve this...?"

"Then... how about we do this the usual way?", proposed Tooth. "We should examine these mysteries one by one... and the examine each death and figure out how they died."

I nodded at Tooth. "Yeah... getting caught up in the small details won't help us. Let's just look at these murders... as, uh... individual things and figure out what happened, one at the time. We've been doing this before and it worked, so why not do the same again here?"

Everyone nodded. I understood how they felt: there was certainly pressure on us. If we failed to uncover the blackened's identity, we would pay the ultimate price. But we mustn't be hasty. We must carefully debate this until we reach the truth.

"So... what do we start with?", asked Snotlout.

"Well, if we're goin' to start figurin' stuff out, we should probably start with the Monobear File, no?", said Merida, "I mean, that's where the info about how our friends got killed is, right?"

"That's a nice place to start...", mumbled Fishlegs, "Umm, let's see... I think the File went like this..."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobear File 04:<strong>

\*\*Victim(s): Anna of Arendelle, Tuffnut & Ruffnut Thorston, Elsa of Arendelle\*\*

\*\*Cause of death: The victim is showing a bruise on the back of the head matching that of a cylindrical object from a single strike, in addition to a stab wound deep enough to damage the heart. Victim is showing bruise in the back of the head, no additional injuries detected. Victim is showing cracks in back of skull, impact matching that of thick cylindrical object, died an instant death from single hit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Yeah... it went like that alright... but just like Peter had pointed out before...<p>

"Hey! Doesn't that Monobear File sound weird!", said Snotlout.

"Yeah... It's showing how the victims died... but it's not showing \*\*which victim correlates to each cause of death\*\*!", explained Flynn.

"But why?", asked Tooth.

"Well, if its just like the previous case...", began Jack, finger on his temple, eyes closed, "The previous Monobear File was missing info on purpose \*\*because that info was important to the case's culprit\*\*, no? So maybe, the same applies here!"

"I think so too", said Peter, nodding at the Ultimate Mystery. "So it is best if we start here. We need to figure out who was killed by what."

"Yeah! If we keep going at it, we'll figure out something, I'm sure!", said Rapunzel, trying to fire us up.

...For some reason, there was \*\*something else on this Monobear File aside from the lack of names for the victims \*\*that was bothering me. But I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I shouldn't dwell on it, though... I'll keep that nagging feeling in my mind, but for now I have to focus on the problem at hand.

"So... we should probably start out with the obvious stuff...", mumbled Jack as he looked over the contents of the Monobear File. I nodded at him and I couldn't help but to smile back when he did the same. Focus, Haddock, focus...!

"I think it's safe to say that... the third victim mentioned in the File... \*\*cracked skull because of thick cylindrical object\*\*... Yeah, it most likely refers to the Twins.", I said to everyone.

"Y-Yeah... It has to be them.", said Fishlegs, looking pale, "I-I mean... when we looked at the crime scene... we found what was the murder weapon... a \*\*metal bat smeared with blood\*\*. So the third victim most likely refers to them."

"The Blackened... definitely used the bat to kill the Twins.", said Jack in a low tone. He... really seemed affected by their death. The Twins were annoying but they got along with Jack decently enough, no doubt accomplices in many practical jokes.

"OK... so that's one figured out. That was easy.", said Snotlout, looking prideful.

"That's because it was an obvious one, ya dingus.", said Merida, rolling her eyes at the Ultimate Heavy Lifter. "Now... if the third victim is the Twins... who is the second one?"

"And who's the first one? Both of these victims carry the same injury...", said Rapunzel as she tried to figure this out.

By reading the Monobear File carefully... I was able to deduce who the first victim was. In retrospect, it was obvious, kinda. But then again, I'm sure I wasn't the only one who figured it out. After all, I wasn't the only one who was in **that room** when we investigated the body.

"True... both the second and the first victim have a similar injury; the bruise to the back of their heads... But... if we examine **the other injury** on the first victim... then we can easily identify who it was, right Merida?", I asked to the redhead, who looked at me with a face full of surprise.

"Huh? What'cha talkin' about...?", began the Ultimate Archer, who began to read the Monobear File carefully before excitedly exclaiming, "Ooooh! Yeah! I see now! You're right! If I compare the first victim listed in the File with Anna's body... yep! It's a perfect match!"

"What? Hold on... you're jumping way ahead!", complained Snotlout, "Why is the first victim Anna? Why can't it be Elsa?"

"Because, you simple-minded idiot, Anna's body and the first victim share an identical wound; **a profound stab in the heart**.", explained Peter with a roll of his eyes.

"On top of that... Anna died in the Olympic Pool Room, meaning she had to have had access to the room, right?", asked Jack leadingly. "And if we look at the Loan Registry, we can plainly see that she had an eHandbook for that room on her!"

"So that leaves the second victim as Elsa... who was killed solely by the metal bat.", surmised Flynn, who then shuddered slightly. "Man, that metal bat sure got around."

"We... really need to keep a closer eye on the supermarket... it's like a hotspot for criminal goods.", commented Rapunzel with a nervous smile.

"It's a little bit late for that...", said Tooth dejectedly. "In any case... we just identified who the victims are in the Monobear File. In order; Anna, killed in the Olympic Pool Room... Elsa, killed in the Combat Room... and the Twins, killed in the lobby."

That seems... about right. But that nagging feeling still bothers me...

"So... with that out of the way... now what?", asked Flynn, looking at all of us expectantly.

"Weeell... it's a little early to make deductions on the killer's identity... so why don't we start solving the victim's cause of death?", suggested Fishlegs.

"Why? We all know what killed all of them.", huffed the Ultimate Heavy Lifter. "All of them got bopped by the metal bat. End of Story."

...Seriously...? Snotlout, are you even trying?!

With a groan, Peter spoke up. "If stupidity was a talent, you'd be truly Ultimate at it. While it is true that the Twins and Elsa were definitely killed by the metal bat, I find it hard to believe that it was Anna's cause of death as well."

"Why?", asked Jack, "I mean... the Monobear File does mention she was hit with cylindrical object... and the other guys died because of that strike... so its only natural to assume, no?"

Peter sighed. "Yes... I suppose it would be natural for you to assume that... but if that were her true cause of death, then there would be no reason **\*\*for the other wound\*\*** on her."

With a grimace, I spoke up. "Yeahhh, I have to agree with Peter here, Jack. I really think... her real cause of death was the **\*\*stab wound on her chest\*\***. I mean, when we found Anna... she was still bleeding..."

"Eugh, don't remind me...", spoke up Merida, looking pale. "That was a helluva lot of blood, even for a tough gal like me."

"Such a bloody wound... I think it's safe to say she was stabbed to death. I mean, if you were the killer, you'd had no reason to stab her if you had killed her with the metal bat, right?", I explained to the Ultimate Mystery. "So the metal bat... I think it was used **\*\*to weaken her\*\*** and then **\*\*she was stabbed\*\*** after being hit. That's her true cause of death."

At my explanation, Jack nodded, looking apologetic. "Well... when you put it that way..." I felt a little bad for correcting Jack, but I knew he didn't take it personally. Hopefully.

"Alright, so that is cleared up.", said Flynn as he crossed his arms, "But that still leaves one important question: What was the murder weapon? We already know what hit her in the head, but we still don't know what stabbed her."

"Hrmm... well, when we looked at the scene of the crime.", said Merida as she crossed her arms and tilted her head to the right, trying to focus on a certain memory, "I didn't find anythin' that could be used as a murder weapon. I even looked at the pool, and there was nothin' but clear water in there!"

"Are you sure?", asked Tooth, expectantly.

Merida nodded confidently at her. "Yup! I'm a hundred percent sure! There weren't any stabbin' weapons there! Just water! Lots of water! Heck, there was even water **\*\*outside the pool\*\***! But no murder weapons!"

"Well, this is quite the conundrum.", said Peter, hand under his chin. "If DunBronch is tellin', err... telling the truth... Then we cannot proceed with this line of questioning."

"I AM tellin' the truth!", reaffirmed Merida, "I swear it on my Mum that aside from **\*\*water\*\***, there was no murder weapons there!"

This was... bad. It was waay to early in the Class Trial to be stumped like this. Had we overlooked something?

"Maybe the killer took it away with them? The murder weapon, I mean?", suggested Jack.

"Oh yeah! Maybe they're hiding it on them right now!", agreed Rapunzel.

But... No... the wound was quite big and bloody. Hiding a weapon capable of that would be quite dangerous and risky for the Blackened.

"What if the killer **\*\*just disposed \*\***of it?", suggested Snotlout. "I mean, if they got rid of it, then that explains why we couldn't find it."

But... is that really possible? I mean, even if Merida somehow missed the weapon, there was no way Peter and I could have missed it in the room. Did the killer... hide it? If so, where, and how? Was there a convenient way for the killer to dispose of a weapon and hide it with such ease?

...I had to focus. Limiting my thinking to just the possibilities in front of me... was no good. I had to think big, I had to think on the big picture. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, trying to navigate the sea of memories and thoughts resonating in my mind. I had to sail through facts and details in order to reach that breakthrough. I needed to find something

...Something... a weapon used for stabbing... something **\*\*sharp and big\*\***... but also something that **\*\*could be hidden in the scene of the murder because the killer couldn't take it away\*\***... Something that... could be hidden in a pool... amidst the **\*\*waters\*\***...

It hit me all of a sudden... it felt like a cold chill running through my spine.

Cold...

Cold... like ice...

Ice...! That's it...!

"T-that's it! That has to be it!", I shouted, excitedly from the realization, much to everyone's surprise. "I know what the killer used to stab Anna!"

"Really?!", asked Rapunzel, shocked.

"Well, don't just stand there, kiddo! Tell us!", demanded Flynn. Oh, I'm going to tell you alright! I don't even know how you guys will take it... It sounds pretty incredible! But this has to be it...

"During our investigation...", I began, "Peter and I found something quite odd in the **\*\*Combat Room\*\***. You see... the Freezer had been meddled with, its temperature settings changed to extreme cold ones. They had been set so low that even the door to the Freezer had frozen over, **\*\*big, sharp icicles\*\*** forming on top of it, even!"

"Yeah, that is pretty weird, Hiccup...", interrupted Tooth, "But what does that even have to do with the murder weapon used to stab

Anna?"

"I was getting to that.", I answered, one finger raised, "You see... there was something that caught my eye on that door. One of the \*\*icicles had been broken off\*\* cleanly..."

I could see the gears on everyone's minds turning. And Jack was the one to speak up first.

"Hic... are you saying... that the Blackened meddled with the Freezer... in order to get some sharp icicles... and once the Blackened got what they wanted... they used one \*\*of the icicles to stab Anna\*\*?!", said the whittette, clear disbelief in his face, as if he was begging me to tell him he was wrong.

But not this time. I nodded with a smile back at him.

"That's right. The icicle from the Freezer... is the murder weapon."

"Don't be saying stupid shit, fishbone!", yelled Snotlout. "Using an icicle to kill someone is something only the Twins could come up with!"

Gee... thanks, Snotlout. "But its the only explanation that accounts for every mystery surrounding Anna's death. I mean...", I looked at Merida, "That's why Merida couldn't find the murder weapon at all. After all, \*\*ice melts after a while, leaving only water behind...\*\*"

Merida snapped her fingers. "So THAT'S why there was so much water outside the pool! It was from the icicle meltin'!"

"So the killer used an unusual weapon like that... Impressive. We are really dealing with someone crafty here...", commented Peter.

I resumed with my explanation. "But even if its an unusual weapon... it has to be it. That's the only thing that fits. The Blackened used the icicle to stab Anna and they got that from the Combat Rooo-"

"U-umm... about that...", interrupted Fishlegs, nervously. The beefy blonde shrank under our stares, and he seemed to curse the fact that he had spoken up. Debating a little before speaking up again, he did so as he stared right at me, a quivery tone to his voice. "I-I'm not saying y-you are wrong Hiccup, I mean... your explanation is pretty solid and accounts for all the facts, as far as we know, so I don't know if I have any right to object so really, this seems like a waste of time, so forgive for speaking out of tur-"

"Get on with it, you muttonhead!", demanded Snotlout, jabbing an impatient finger at the Ultimate Encyclopedia.

"It's just...! There's a problem with your scenario...! And I think its important to point out!", explained Fishlegs.

"A... problem...? Did I... miss something, Fishlegs?", I asked, suddenly worried. I thought I was correct... what did I overlook?

Fish gulped. "Well, the problem with your scenario... is the location itself.", with a sigh, the Ultimate Encyclopedia prepared to explain. "I mean, you are saying that the killer \*\*got into the Combat Room and got the icicle from there\*\*, and then went into the \*\*Olympic Pool Room where Anna was\*\*, and killed her, right?"

I nodded. What... is he getting at?

"But you see, Hiccup... that premise is flawed. It's simply impossible.", stated the blonde teen.

"What do you mean by that, Fish?", asked Jack, clearly not following... like me.

"What I'm saying is... it's impossible because... well, of \*\*the eHandbooks\*\*.", at that, I began to understand... Oh Gods... he's right... "I mean, you guys remember how the Gym works, right? In order to enter any room, you need an eHandbook loaned from Monobear. But that eHandbook only opens \*\*that one room, and if you want to open another room, you need to get another one from Monobear\*\*."

"So?", contested Flynn, "What's the problem with that? Yeah, we know how the gym works. There is no problem with the kid's explanation, though. All the killer had to do was to get another eHandbook from Monobear and that's that."

Fishlegs shook his head. "No, that couldn't be done... Because, if we look at the Loan Registry we can see who borrowed which eHandbook:"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobuff Gym eHandbook Loan Registry:<strong>

\*\* - THE Snotlout - Heavy Lifting Room\*\*

\*\* - Elsa - Combat Room\*\*

\*\* - TUFF - Olympic Pool Room\*\*

\*\* - RUFF - Combat Room\*\*

\*\* - Anna Arendelle - Olympic Pool Room\*\*

\*\* - REA - VIP\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>...<p>

...Darn it...

Fishlegs continued to explain his point. "A-And as you can see... only the victims and Snotlout had borrowed eHandbooks... and on top of that... \*\*none of them ever held the eHandbooks that opened both the Olympic Pool and the Combat Room\*\*."

Merida whined. "I don't get what the problem is! This is confusin'!"



Peter spoke up. "What Ingerman is stating is this: For the icicle weapon theory to be true, the Blackened must have had access to both the Combat and Pool Rooms. And in order to do so, the killer must have had gotten those eHandbooks from Monobear. And yet... when we look at the registry... \*\*No person ever held both of those two handbooks at the same time\*\*. In fact, it seems like all of the people in the registry only ever held one eHandbook at the time."

"But if that is true...", spoke up Rapunzel, "then none of these people could have gone to the Combat Room, gotten the icicle and then have gotten into the Olympic Pool to kill Anna. They couldn't have entered those rooms at all."

They... they were right. They were absolutely right. As long as that problem exists, my icicle theory vanishes. After all, if the murder weapon couldn't even get into the scene... then how can I even declare its the murder weapon? Damn it... I was so focused on the \_what.\_... that I didn't fully examine the \_how.\_... Was I mistaken then? Had Hiccup the Useless messed everything up...?

"But, Hic's theory makes so much sense...!" defended Jack earnestly, and that made me doubt myself a little less, "Even if that problem Fish talked about exists... can we really dismiss Hic's idea just like that? It has to be correct, no?"

"Yeah, but the fact is, Jack... that problem kinda discredits the kid's theory completely.", interjected Flynn, much to the whitette's annoyance.

"So... we have to decide whether we have to trust Hiccup's theory or not, despite the problems?", asked Tooth, looking at me nervously.

"Do we even have the luxury to do that? Our lives are on the line here...", retorted Flynn.

Peter, who had been quiet during this whole exchange, suddenly spoke up. "Not necessarily... we do not have to choose whether to believe blindly on Haddock's theory or not... Because I believe \*\*he is right\*\*."

...Huh?

"You believe Hiccup is right... despite the problem on his theory?", asked Fishlegs, looking conflicted. At his query, Peter nodded without hesitation.

"Yes... I do believe him... because, you see... that problem you just expounded on... has a solution.", said the Ultimate Fear Expert with such conviction, a smile played on his lips.

"Really? Is there really a way to solve the problem with Hiccup's theory?", asked Tooth, looking hopeful.

"Man, a solution to an impossible problem? That sounds like a fucking riddle...", complained Snotlout.

"But it is not. In fact, the answer to that conundrum... is in \*\*the

Loan Registry itself\*\*.", said Peter, his gaze on me. Expectant. Waiting.

Is he... waiting for me to answer? But why? Why can't he just tell us if he knows? I-I mean... no matter how much I try... there's no way I would be able to... come up with something. And even if I was able to come up with something... There's no way it'd be right...

And yet, he's not the only one who is staring at me expectantly. Even Jack is. That's right... he still firmly believes in me, no matter what. Should I... react to that belief and move forward? Should I give this a try...?

...No, I definitely must give this a try. Because if I give up here, the deaths and pain we all went through, the sacrifices we had to do, the lesson Aster taught us... all of those things would be in vain. So I must try. Give it my all.

With renewed confidence, I took a look at the Loan Registry, where the answer to the problem supposedly is. The problem being \*\*that it was impossible for \*\*\_\*\*one\*\*\_\*\* person to get an icicle from the Combat Room to the Olympic Pool Room because none of the people in the Loan Registry ever had both of those eHandbooks on them\*\*.

And it's true... when you look at it...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobuff Gym eHandbook Loan Registry:<strong>

\*\* - THE Snotlout - Heavy Lifting Room\*\*

\*\* - Elsa - Combat Room\*\*

\*\* - TUFF - Olympic Pool Room\*\*

\*\* - RUFF - Combat Room\*\*

\*\* - Anna Arendelle - Olympic Pool Room\*\*

\*\* - REA - VIP\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The only people who ever held an eHandbook were the victims and Snotlout.<p>

But Peter is confident that the answer is here... Maybe... I need to think from another angle? I need to find a way... that makes it possible for one person to \*\*enter the Combat Room and the Olympic Pool Room without needing to have the two eHandbooks for said rooms at the same time\*\*.

...Is that even possible though? Monobear said \*\*that only one person can have one eHandbook at the time... Not two...\*\* But I guess... It must be possible... because Peter said so, but...

...W-wait...

...Huh? ...Is that...?

...! N-no way... No freaking way...! C-Could it be... but...!

"B-But that's insane!", I yelled out loud, overcome with the realization... the completely unbelievable and utterly crazy realization that hit me. "Is... is this for real?!"

"What's wrong, Hic?!", asked Jack, looking worried, his eyes wide, and his posture tense.

"Did you figure out something, Hiccup?", asked Tooth, eagerly.

"Did you find out a way to move the icicle from the Combat Room to the Olympic Pool without any issues?!", asked Fishlegs, wringing his hands with excitement.

I... I did. I really did. I nodded slowly at the others, still digesting what I came up with. I...I had no idea what was going on, nor what was going to happen once I unleashed this truth on the others. Anxiety bubbled up inside me... this thing was so unrealistic, so dumb-sounding... what if I was wrong? And yet... this must be the thing Peter found out. So... it has to be correct. But if it's correct...!

I gulped and steadied my breath. I needed to straighten out my thoughts and calm down. Sure, I may be wrong... but I must press forward, no matter how completely nonsensical my conclusion is. Because moving forward... is better than not even trying at all.

"It's like Fishlegs said... it is impossible for **one** person to get an icicle from the Combat Room to the Pool Room and then stab Anna.", I began, and I could feel the tension as everyone waited for me to go on. "But the fact that we're thinking like that... that all of this was the work of one person... is what is preventing us from seeing what really happened."

I took a breath as I let that sink in. "No, what actually happened is this... **two people** **were** collaborating in this murder. With two people, it is perfectly possible to open both rooms. All they would have to do is... borrow the Handbook for the room they needed to open separately. That way, it would be perfectly possible for the icicle to move from the Combat Room to the Pool Room!"

"Ooh! Like a relay race!", said Merida, nodding with understanding.

"N-no way...! Are you saying... there's an accomplice in this case?!", asked Flynn, looking shocked.

Judging by Peter's nod and smile, it seems he was thinking the same as me. So, I answered Flynn, saying yes to his question.

"But... all of us knew that only the one who did the killing would get to graduate... and that there's no benefit for the accomplice.", said Fishlegs, "Knowing that... would anyone willingly help with a murder? Is that... even possible?"

"It is the only way that explains all the circumstances surrounding

Anna's death.", explained Peter. "So, I agree with Haddock's conclusion. This has to be it."

"Alright... that's great and all...", said Snotlout, looking angry despite the fact that he was agreeing with me. "But... who are the accomplices? Who are the sick bastards that planned this out and tried to frame me?!"

A thick silence permeated the room. The silence of ignorance, of lack of information. Well, not entirely. It was normal for the others to not speak up... they really didn't know what was going on nor they had any clue about the identity of the accomplices. But I... I wasn't speaking up for the same reason as them. My silence was... the silence of the learned. Of one who knew what was going on.

...That's right, I know who are the ones who killed Anna. If I look \*\*at the Loan Registry and check who had eHandbooks for the Combat and Pool Rooms\*\*, its obvious... And yet... I find it so hard to speak up. Because even though its the only thing that makes sense... I don't want to believe it. But I don't have a choice. In order to survive... I have to keep pressing on.

"There are only two people capable of pulling this off... and those people are... \*\*Tuffnut and Ruffnut Thorston, also known as the Twins, the Ultimate Demolition Duo\*\*! They're the Blackened!"

At my declaration, that charged silence that dominated the room predictably exploded with the cries of shock and confusion of my friends. Wow, they didn't even let that sink in...

"Are you fucking serious?", asked Snotlout, being the most vocal, "That's wrong! That has to be! I mean, even \_I \_can tell you that!"

"Not that I wanna give Snotface any credit or anythin', Hiccup, but he's right.", chimed in Merida, "I mean, they're dead, y'know? They are victims!"

"To say that \_them\_ of all people are the ones behind this is-", began Tooth, but she was interrupted by Peter.

"It is as Hiccup said. The ones that got the icicle to stab Anna were none other than the Thorston twins."

"B-but why?! Why does it have to be them?", challenged Flynn.

"Because... if you look at the Loan Registry, you can see that there are only two people in there that had eHandbooks that opened the Combat and Pool Rooms aside from Anna... and that was \*\*the Twins\*\*. So, it has to be them!", I explained.

"I get what you're saying...", said Rapunzel, biting her thumb a little as she processed the revelation. "But isn't that \*\*against the loaning rules established by Monobear\*\*? After all, he did say that he would only loan a single eHandbook to a single student... right?"

Jack faced Monobear at that, his expression incredibly serious. "Hey, run that by us again. Do your rules consider the Twins as a single

student or two people?"

Monobear crossed his arms, and hummed, his feet dangling from the throne swaying a little, "Well, here's how I see it: It's true that the Nutty Twins were a single student in Hope's Peak Academy's records... and while it made a lot of things convenient for me... there's no doubt that \*\*both of them were their own person\*\*, despite how attached to each other's hips they were."

"So... it was possible for them to borrow different eHandbooks individually and without a problem.", said Jack.

"Of course, that much is obvious by looking at the Registry.", stated Peter with a roll of his eyes, "If it wasn't possible, then there's no way Monobear would have allowed their names on there."

"P-plus... now that I think about it...", said Fishlegs, brow furrowed, "D-didn't... the Twins have eHandbooks on them? I-I'm sure Hiccup found some on them."

"Yeah...", I said, "Yeah, I did. There's no doubt about it. The Twins definitely got eHandbooks. As it stands... they are the most likely candidates for our Blackened."

"I-I guess so...", mumbled Tooth, pale and struck with shock. "I mean, not only did they have access to the Pool... \*\*they also had access to the Combat Room\*\*... so that means... they \*\*could have also killed Elsa\*\*."

Jack grimaced, struck by the grim realization... and something else. "Didn't... you say this, Hic? You said that the bat we found in the Lobby... the one used to kill the Twins. You said... \*\*that the bat had blood and signs of being used on opposite sides of its surface\*\*... as if it had been used more than once...", he visibly gulped, "Does this mean... the ones that used the bat to strike Anna and kill Elsa... were also them?"

"Holy shit...!", yelled Snotlout, his eyes wide. "Everything is matching up...! So you're being for real?! The ones that killed those girls... were those muttonheads?!", he laughed nervously, "I can't fucking believe it..."

"But they were so stupid!", yelled Flynn, shaking his head, "I never thought they would be able to come up with a scheme so complicated like this!"

"But as Snotlout said...", interjected Rapunzel as she fiddled with a strand of her hair, "Everything is falling into place... so they must be the Blackened... indubitably."

At those statements, Monobear perked up, his hands quivering with excitement

"Hmm? Is it voting time already? Have you guys reached a consensus yet?", asked Monobear to all of us, annoyingly. "C'mon! C'mon! What's it gonna be? Don't stall for more time, y'know? For every word I say, the cost of production for this story rises, so decide on something! Is it voting time already or not?"

...Is it?

There's... no way I'm mistaken this time. Like everyone pointed out, everything matches up. The Twins were the only one capable of executing these murders. They had the means to enter the crime scenes where the girls, our friends, were murdered. So... they must definitely be the killers.

In the face of all that evidence... is it OK to start the voting time already?

...

...No.

No, there's no way we can start the voting time already! Because... because there's still a lot of mysteries left unsolved in this case! In fact, there's a big one left to solve yet...!

"Hold on. Let's not rush to the voting yet.", I said, catching everyone's attention. "We can't start the voting... until we solve all the mysteries."

"But what mystery is left to solve?!", asked Snotlout, looking eager to finish this. But there was no way I was going to let him finish.

"The most important one... \*\*who killed the Twins\*\*.", I said. I can't believe I actually forgot about that. I guess I was too caught up in the moment...?

"Oh, crap. The kid's right.", said Flynn, obviously caught off guard. "They were also victims, right?"

"Oh yeah... they got their noggins smashed in with the same metal bat they used to kill, right?", said Merida, looking as if she had realized how much we were rushing along.

"That's true...", said Jack, looking flustered. "Man, we were so excited about the fact that we found out who killed Anna and Elsa, that we forgot someone killed our murderers."

"It is as Haddock says.", added Peter, looking solemn and serious. "While we have untangled a mess in this web of complicated schemes, there are still some knots left to undo, mysteries to solve. And the biggest one left to unravel... is the \*\*identity of the True Blackened, the one who orchestrated the demise of the Thorston twins\*\*."

...! The True Blackened...

That's right.

On that night, a complicated series of events happened, and the end result of that... was the loss of our friends at the hands of two unexpected culprits. But what those culprits didn't know was... the fact that they had been lured into a trap even more complex than the one they had woven. A trap so complex and confusing... that it even ensnared all of us.

Despite all the deductions we have made, all the truths brought to

light... we are still stuck in the True Blackened's trap...

Can we... will we be able to claw our way out of it? Can we even break through this despair...?

\_All we can do is try...\_

\* \* \*

><p>CLASS TRIAL INTERRUPTED<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- MONOBEAR THEATER -<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"You know... I really admire people who have never accomplished anything before."<p>

"Why, you ask? Well, let me tell you the story about a certain talented and wonderful bear. Ever since he was born, he had access to countless talents and virtues and he was basically the best at everything ever! No matter what problems he faced, he overcame them and he was on the receiving end of prizes and accolades for his achievements! "

"However... eventually, it became harder for that incredible bear to meet the expectations of people who witnessed his glorious feats. The stakes rose with each success, and soon enough, no matter how much he tried, he was unable to inspire awe on anyone. He was unable to meet expectations. It was impossible for him to ever surpass his previous successes."

"That's why I admire people who never accomplished anything before! Yup yup! They sure have limitless freedom and boundless potential! They don't have to meet anyone's expectations and they don't have to excel at anything! I, too, yearn for a life of simple and happy mediocrity!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And that's all he wrote for now. Literally. Hopefully this will hold you off as I toil away to write the conclusion of the trial. That part will indubitably be even more longer and hopefully more shocking and plot-twisty than this one. Don't worry, there's still a lot to cover.<strong>

\*\*It really sucks, how I lost the entire chapter, but hey! I already rewrote 7k words of the 20k+ ones I lost! We're almost there.\*\*

\*\*Please stand by as I finish the rest of the chapter. Well, not really standby, you can, of course, sound off your theories as always. \*\*

\*\*It's good to be back! I'll see ya soon enough!\*\*

**\*\*Chapter 33 - Despair-Syndrome - Class Trial B\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Holy moly is this thing huge. I finally finished typing this monster down and I feel liberated! Please, enjoy the conclusion to the third class trial!<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>CLASS TRIAL RESUMED<strong>

**\*\*Jack's POV\*\***

Confused. If there was one way to describe how I felt, that would be it.

I didn't have a clear understanding of the case to begin with due to my forced absence, but after Hic's revelation...? Man, now I clearly had no idea of what was going on.

The Twins... had murdered someone, and in turn, someone else had killed them. So we had a pair of Blackeneds and a True Blackened, huh? I'm not doubting Hic's conclusions, but it really seems far-fetched. And judging by the looks of the others, I'm not the only one who thinks that way.

"I can't believe that the Twins killed someone...", mumbled Tooth.

"And here I thought that once we found the Blackened, we would be finished with the Trial, too...", said Flynn, his eyes closed, a scowl in his face. "But no, it looks like we still have ways to go."

"Yeah...", agreed Merida, "We have to figure out WHO killed the Twins and why did all of this happen... Man, I'm feelin' a lil' daunted..."

No kidding. This had to be the toughest case so far, because of all the complications. But we had to keep going. I didn't want to die here! And also... I don't want to let the bastard who killed my friends go scot free. So we have to keep going.

"It is a little daunting...", said Fishlegs, looking nervous all of a sudden, "That is... if we assume everything Hiccup said is true."

At that, Hic lifted an eyebrow. "What do you mean by that, Fishlegs...?"

Goddammit, more interruptions?! Well... I couldn't fault Fish for that; we had to debate fully every possible scenario so that there is no doubt left... but there's something about the fact that no one trusts Hic's theories enough that makes me mad. But I wasn't going to speak up... just yet.

"Well... I will admit that the icicle theory must be true... as far murder weapons go."



Hic nodded. "That's the only thing that explains why the Freezer was messed with deliberately and why there was an icicle missing. It's... an unusual weapon, I'm aware, but..."

Fish nodded and continued, "True... It's the only one that makes sense and matches the evidence... or lack of it, but...", the blonde boy bit his lip. "Are we sure the Twins actually killed someone...?"

At the stunned silence of everyone, Fish hurried his explanation up. "I mean...! I agree that there is definitely a True Blackened behind all of this... but I don't think the Twins committed any crimes at all!"

"Why... do you say that?", asked Pitch, his gaze intense. Predictably, the Ultimate Encyclopedia gave a yelp.

"Well! I-I just find it very hard to believe that the Twins would kill someone, is all! N-not to spit on the dead, but I can't see the Twins as being capable of such an elaborate scheme... and on top of that, we are to believe that someone coincidentally learned of their murder plans and plotted to murder them? Isn't that kind of coincidence... sort of very impossible?"

"B-but...!", stammered Hic, "The Twins were the only ones capable of getting the icicle to the scene of the crime! Isn't... isn't that enough? I mean, the proof is in the Loan Registry!"

Fish shook his head. "That... kind of falls apart if the Twins were killed first than the other victims.", at Hic's shocked silence, the blonde boy elaborated, "I... I mean... your theory that incriminate the Twins as the murderers of Anna and Elsa revolves around the idea that Anna and Elsa died first, and the Twins last, but... there is no proof of that, is there?"

"D-does the killing order really matter, though?", I said, hurriedly, "I mean...! The Loan Registry casts enough suspicion on them and they even had eHandbooks on them! S-So... Hic must be right!"

Again, the Ultimate Encyclopedia shook his head. "N-not really... sure, the Loan Registry incriminates the Twins... but it also names another possible suspect:"

**\*\*Monobuff Gym eHandbook Loan Registry:\*\***

**\*\* - THE Snotlout - Heavy Lifting Room \*\***

**\*\* - Elsa - Combat Room \*\***

**\*\* - TUFF - Olympic Pool Room \*\***

**\*\* - RUFF - Combat Room \*\***

**\*\* - Anna Arendelle - Olympic Pool Room \*\***

**\*\* - REA - VIP \*\***

"See that last entry there...?", asked Fish, "Whoever this REA person is had access to the VIP eHandbook... the one **\*\*that allows entry to any and all rooms in the Gym\*\***. Don't you guys think... that this REA

person is far m-more suspicious than the Twins?"

I grunted, obviously stumped. Hic wasn't looking too hot either. Well, he was, but not in that way...! He was biting his thumb and he looked at a loss for words.

"Now that you mention it...", mumbled Flynn, looking as if he were seriously considering Fish's words.

"For real?! Are we doubting the fishbone's theory AGAIN?! I thought we had settled this already!", complained Snot.

"But Fishlegs' words ring true," defended Punzie, looking at Hic apologetically, "As long as those problems with Hiccup's theory persist... can we truly be sure its the truth?"

"God damn it... and here I thought we had made some fucking progress but we actually took a step back!", continued Snot, whining even more.

"Heeey! If you guys keep wasting time and jumping all over the place without a consensus, I'm going to cut this trial short! Some of us have a life here, yknow?!", chimed in Monobear, not helping at all.

The tension we were feeling before rose tenfold.

We thought we had unraveled a mystery, but there are even more problems now. We thought we were closer to the truth, but in reality, we hadn't even moved towards it that much. But whining isn't going to get us anywhere. We have to keep hacking at these problems until the tendrils of despair are cut apart. We must keep going.

I must look at the evidence once again and tackle the problems with Hic's theory.

Those problems being:

The order of death. If the Twins died first, then there's no way for them to be the killers of Anna and Elsa.

The existence of this... REA person. Since they hold the VIP eHandbook, they are far more suspicious than the Twins because they had access to all the rooms and thus, access to all the victims.

...I don't think... I can tackle the second problem just yet. I can't disprove it; the possibility of this REA person being the only killer is very real. In fact, it would be easier for me to just accept that and move on with this Class Trial. It would... definitely be less painful too... because it would mean the Twins were innocent. But... I believe in Hic's assertions. His theory makes so much sense... and besides, what kind of b-boyfriend would I be if I didn't trust him?

So I must tackle the first problem instead.

As Fish said, there is no evidence that shows the real order of the murders. But... is this the only way we can approach this? I mean... I guess... if I take a look at this from another angle... is there

evidence that \*\*proves the Twins had a definite hand in the killings\*\*? If I had evidence of that... I wouldn't need to establish an order of death; as long as I could prove that the Twins killed someone, that would be enough!

...But is such a convenient piece of evidence real? I mean, if Hic, Pitch and Fish didn't find anything... then it must not exist-

...!

As I scroll through the evidence list on my ElectroID with those thoughts in mind, I stop on one evidence entry that I found very strange. And as I read the notes on it, I can feel it. A feeling of elation, of breakthrough.

Of disbelief. Of joyous disbelief. I... I can't believe...!

"I GOT IT!", I can't help it. A shout of joy, a whoop, a jump and a fistpump follow soon after the revelation I reached. "I GOT IT! I FIGURED OUT! YES! YESSSS!"

"What did you figure out, Jack?", asked Tooth, and I didn't miss the tone of concern in her voice behind her smile, but I was too happy with myself to care.

"I figured out! I found a \*\*piece of evidence that shows that the Twins definitely killed someone\*\*!", I said, sticking out my chest with pride instinctively.

"R-really?!", asked Hic, his face glowing with hope. I loved that expression of his. I reassured him with a nod and a smile.

"Then stop flirting and tell us already, you weirdo!", demanded Snot, ruining the moment, much to my chagrin. But he had a point... again. Man, was he on a roll.

"Well... as Fish said, one of the problems with Hic's theory was the fact that there was no way to prove that the Twins had died last.", I began, aware that everyone was looking at me expectantly, "I mean, if they had died first, then there was no way for them to be capable of murdering Anna and Elsa."

"BUT! During the investigation, Hic, Pitch and Mer \*\*found a strange piece of evidence\*\*.", as I said their names, the eyebrows of those people rose, and Hic immediately dived into his ElectroID to review the evidence, his eyes scanning the object with intensity and swiftness.

"And that piece of evidence... that proves that the Twins had a hand in the killings... were a pair of \*\*notes\*\*!", I finished.

Mer immediately spoke up. "Ooooh! That's right! I even told Hiccup about it! We definitely found some weird notes on the scene of the crime, right?!"

Hic immediately picked up on that, and nodded, realization dawning on his face. "Oh yeah! T-there was definitely some notes there, alright! And those notes had this... written on it:" said the little Viking as he recounted the contents of the notes.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>First Note:<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-Get rid of target<strong>

\*\* -Deliver goods to CR\*\*

\*\* -Wait on lobby for more instructions.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Second Note:<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Please come to the Olympic Pool Room at 4 AM. We have to talk about something, make sure no one follows you.<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>"<strong>You're right Jack, those are some weird notes... but what does that prove?", asked Fish, his gaze unsure as he looked at the evidence.

"Well... first, let's begin by figuring out who these notes are addressed to.", I said, leading the Ultimate Encyclopedia around.

"Well, they must be directed to the victims, right?", supplied Punzie, "I mean, if they were found at the scene of the crime, then that makes sense."

"But there are two notes here...", said Snot, scratching his head. "Were both of them for the same person or...?"

"Obviously not.", rebutted Pitch. "The notes conflict with themselves: They obviously are addressed to different people."

"And... one of them must be Anna.", spoke up Hic, his eyes shining with understanding. He looked at me, as if asking for permission to go on, and I nodded encouragingly. "I mean... the second note specifically asks for the recipient to \*\*go to the Olympic Pool Room\*\*... and Anna was killed there. So it must be her."

"Right.", I continued. Man, this feeling is great! "Which leaves the first note's recipient as the Twins."

"Wh-? Why do you say that, Jack?", asked Flynn, not following.

"Because, my dear Rider," I answered in a mocking posh tone, earning me a glare, "The first note matches the \*\*movements of the Twins\*\*! Not only the note asks for the recipient to go to the CR..."

"The \*\*C\*\*ombat \*\*R\*\*oom!", interjected Punzie, happily.

"It also asks the reader to wait in the Lobby! And that... is the place where the Twins were murdered.", I finished.

"That's good and all, but that doesn't prove that the Twins killed anyone.", defended Fish stubbornly. Man, I never knew he had a side like that.

"But it does.", I insisted. No way I'm letting up on this. "Because this note... or rather, this set of instructions makes one thing very clear: the recipient was going to kill someone. All you have to do is read the first line: **\*\*Get rid of target\*\***."

"And since the note was directed to the Twins...", said Snot, surprisingly following this back and forth.

"Then this means... the Twins most definitely killed someone!", summarized Hic.

"Which also means... that at the very least, Anna **\*\*died first\*\***.", I added. "After all, it can't be a coincidence. A note asks one of the victims to meet on a specific place... while another note hints at the murder of a victim. They must... no, they are related!"

"Indubitably!", interjects Punzie, looking proud of herself.

"This also supports the theory of the kid.", said Flynn as he looked at Hic. "I mean, think about it... he said the Twins had murdered Anna and Elsa, right? Well, these notes prove that; the Thorstons were on a mission to get rid of a target."

"And...", added Tooth, "It also supports the fact that a True Blackened was pulling the strings of this whole act. These notes... I doubt the Twins wrote them... so they must have been given to the recipients by someone else... and when all was said and done... the True Blackened killed the Tuff and Ruff."

Yeah... even I... had to admit it. Even if I was the one who had pointed out the evidence that proved this fact, I still found it hard to swallow; I had befriended those two muttonheads and though they had a meaner pranking streak than me, I always knew they weren't fully malicious. It was still hard to believe that they had taken a life... willingly or otherwise. But in the light of this evidence, even Fish had to admit-

"T-that's still not enough!"

...I guess not. The sigh that left the my lips was very audible. What more proof did this guy need?! A signed "I killed them all" note from the dead?!

"I-I agree that the note in itself is very incriminating", stuttered the blonde chubby boy, painfully aware of the glares he was receiving. "B-but that doesn't really mean they did it! I mean, what if they didn't even follow the note? The Twins were notoriously unruly, after all. Not really the most strict rule-followers."

"Well, Fish here does have a point," conceded Mer, "Ain't ever seen

more wild folk than those two, and I live with three brothers of mine who are like miniature versions of them."

All of a sudden, I found myself wanting to know these brothers of hers. But this isn't the time for that, I guess.

"But it has to be them.", offered Hic, his green eyes alight with determination. "There's no other explanation. In fact, it's the only explanation that, well, explains... the surrounding circumstances behind the discovery of Anna's body."

"What do you mean by that, Hiccup?", asks Rapunzel, well, asking the same question I had in mind.

"I meant,", said Hiccup, suddenly realizing that he had gone ahead of us in his train of deduction. Despite how serious he was looking while he expounded on his point, I could see a faint blush on his cheeks. Classic Hic. "Don't you find it kind of strange? I mean, Snotlout triggered the Body Discovery Announcement, but doesn't that happen only when the \*\*a third person, counting the killer, finds the body?\*\* So... who were the two people who found it before?"

"Are you suggesting... that the two people who found Anna's body before Snotlout... were the Twins?", asked Pitch, his eyebrow rising with doubt.

"Well... it wouldn't be weird.", defended Tooth, "After all... the Twins were almost always together. If Hiccup is right and the Twins were actually together after they got the icicle when Tuffnut killed Anna... then that would make them the two people who found the body before Snotlout...", Tooth clapped her hands excitedly, "Then that would definitely \*\*prove that they were on the scene of the crime\*\*, indubitably!"

"...Can we stop using that word?", begged Flynn.

"B-but..!", insisted Fishlegs, "That only applies if the Twins are counted as a two different people instead of one student!"

"And, guess what? They do!", interrupted Monobear, looking giddy, "Didn't I tell you? Though Hope's Peak Academy considered the Nutty Twins as a single student, here, in this little camp of mine, they were their \*\*own, individual people \*\*with individual wills!"

"... \*gasp\*! Did I give away a hint?! Why, I'm such an adorable klutz, you can't help but to fall in love with me~"

...No, I'll never ever think like that about you. The only feeling I have for the Headmaster is utter hate. But he... well, just confirmed it. With this piece of data...

Yep, one look at Fish's face and it looks like all the fight left him. His continued silence seems to seal the deal. Finally, I don't know what else we could throw at him to make him accept Hic's theory.

...The theory that they... actually killed someone.

"So... does this really mean those halfwits actually offed Anna and Elsa?", asked Mer, her voice oddly small.

"It does seem that way, yes...", supplied Pitch. "We shouldn't have the need to spend so much time clearing up this immutable fact. It was obvious, really..."

"But why would Tuffnut and Ruffnut kill someone?", asked Punzie, her face puzzled. "I mean, yes, they were kind of mischievous but I never thought they were malicious!"

"Me neither... and something tells me they weren't doing this fully aware of the consequences," said Flynn as he looked on his eHandbook. "I mean, just look at the note the kid and Merida found! Those were clearly **\*\*instructions to follow\*\***. Instructions written by **\*\*someone pulling the strings\*\***!"

...The True Blackened... huh? So we come back to that in the end...

"But still. Why would those idiots even follow those instructions! I mean, even I know the rules of this place! I wouldn't just follow what some note said to me so easily!", wondered Snot.

"Well... **\*\*they couldn't exactly help it\*\***.", spoke up Hic. "After all, the Twins were under the influence of something that clouded their judgement."

"Oh!", I said, realizing what he meant. "That's right! That stupid Despair-Syndrome disease! Which one did they have again...? The **\*\*Gullible Disease\*\***, right?"

Hic nodded. "Yeah... they were willing enough to follow orders and believe anything that they were told. It... certainly made them the perfect pair of unwilling accomplices for the True Blackened." Judging by how Hic was tightening his grip on the booth he was holding into, I could tell this did not make him happy.

"So... the True Blackened took advantage of the illness to make them do their dirty work... and then betrayed them?", asked Tooth, looking appalled.

"And in such a-a... cruel way too. They were done in with one hit... they probably didn't even know that this was going to happen to them...", added Fish.

"Rgggh! I'm so mad! I hate people who take advantage of others like this!", yelled Merida, her fiery hair looking like a fire storm, "Who is the craven who did this?! Who is the True Blackened?!"

The true culprit... so far, that person has been eluding us, taunting us with their identity and the deeds. And through the entire Class Trial, we still don't have any idea of who that person is... All we have is...

"The only clue we have to the True Blackened's identity is... the **\*\*last entry in the Loan Registry\*\***. This REA person...", I pointed out.

"REA, huh?", commented Flynn, "what does that even mean?"

"There's no one in this dumb place named REA, that much I know.",

said Snot, not really adding anything to the conversation.

"That is because REA is not a name, you imbecile. It probably stands for the True Blackened's identity. After all, Monobear said you can get an eHandbook as long as \*\*the thing jotted down in the Loan Registry can be associated with you\*\*."

"So REA could really mean anything, then?", asked Punzie, "How are we supposed to figure out anything from that?"

"It could take us hours to try and go through all the possibilities and to deduce that...", mumbled Fish. Sadly, Monobear heard him just fine, and instantly jumped on that.

"Hey! What did I say at the beginning of this Class Trial?! If you take too much time, I'll end this right here, right now! I don't want to become an ice dessert!"

"...Then let us try to figure out the True Blackened's identity through another angle.", proposed Hic.

"What angle do you propose, Haddock?", queried Pitch, looking expectant.

The lil Viking rubbed his arm nervously. "W-well... how about this one? Aside from the killings, what \*\*other suspicious thing did the True Blackened do\*\*?"

Punzie eagerly raised her hand. "Oh! Ohh! Are you talking about Elsa's disappearing act?"

"That's true...", followed up Flynn, rubbing his chin, "We still never did find Elsa's corpse, didn't we? It was taken away by someone right after we discovered it."

"That, I still don't get.", said Mer, scratching her top of the head. "Why would anyone go to the trouble of movin' a body?"

"The only thing I can think of is... well, maybe the body had some inconvenient clues on it. And if that's the case, then the only one who would have something to gain from hiding it would be the True Blackened.", said Fish.

Yeah, of all the possibilities, that's what I came up with too. There's no reason to hide a corpse aside from trying to destroy evidence. So that's most likely what happened.

"Yeah... And I think we can use that to figure out who the mastermind behind this case is.", said Hic with a nod to himself. "All we have to do is... figure out who took the body... and that will point us towards the real killer!"

"What? Really?! We just have to do that one easy thing?!", asked Snot.

"Except it's not gonna be easy...", mumbled Fish, sounding grumpy.

"I heard that! Why do you say that?! How come it's not gonna be easy?!", said the Ultimate Heavy Lifter, grating on my nerves. "All



we have to do is \*\*figure out who had a chance to take the body \*\*and we're golden!"

"Hmm..., the only available time frame when the body could have be moved was...", said Tooth, her eyes closed as she thought this through. "\*\*After we found the body... and before the time we all came back to show the body to Merida and Jack.\*\*"

"...Hold on, isn't that wrong?", asked Flynn, "I mean, if that's really the only time, then it would be \*\*impossible\*\* for the body to be moved!"

...What?

"What are you sayin', Rider?!", confronted Merida.

"Think about it!", continued Flynn, looking grave, "During that time frame, what were we all doing?"

"We were... just after finding the body, we were all...", said Hic before trailing off and gasping with realization. Oh no... this won't be good... I don't like that expression. Not one bit. "\*\*We were all gathered in the lobby. \*\*\_\*\*All of us\*\*\_\_.", \_said Hic as he looked at everyone in the room.

Oh.

...! \_Ohhhhh!\_

Oh damn. Yeah... this \_IS \_bad.

"I don't get it.", said Snot, predictably. "What does that have to do with moving the body being impossible?"

I sighed with exasperation and then proceeded to explain this to him. "Because, Snot, all of us, and I do mean all of us, were gathered in the lobby. Well, all of us who were alive. Which means... all of us have an alibi."

"Ohhh gods, he's right.", added Fish, "Since all of us were together and we were all looking at each other, then no one could have slinked away and stolen the body. All of us being together in the lobby after Elsa's body was found is \*\*our airtight alibi\*\*."

"And, during that time, I'm sure no one left or behaved suspiciously.", added Tooth, biting her nail.

"Which... which means... no one could have moved the body.\*\* It's impossible\*\*.", concluded Flynn. "Believe me, even a thief like me couldn't have stolen anything under those circumstances."

Shit... he was right.

"But it had to be possible!", argued Merida, "I mean, the body did end up vanishin', didn't it? So it was obviously moved by someone!"

"And how do you think that happened?", asked Flynn, "The body couldn't have be moved \*\*before\*\* we found it because, well, obviously we saw it! And the body couldn't have be moved \*\*after\*\* we

went to show it to Jack and Merida because, well, it was missing by that time! The only timeframe available for moving the body was inbetween those two points, and as Fish and the kid have pointed out, **\*\*none of us\*\*** could have done it! We were all together! So how, pray tell, did the body get moved?!"

"I-I dunno! But it obviously did! So don't get all angry at me, Rider! I'm just sayin' what we all saw!", stammered Mer, looking flustered.

"So... an impossible move was made possible. Hmm hmm, quite a fascinating murder this is.", chuckled Pitch, "Alas, we do not have time to bask in the genius of this plan; we have to figure out the trick behind this disappearing act or we are all done for."

Damn... nice way to put on the pressure. But he's right. We have to figure this out! ...Somehow. But just like Flynn said, it does seem kind of impossible. No... it definitely sounds impossible. And yet, against all odds and evidence, **\*\*Elsa's body still moved\*\***... But how? Are we missing something?

"M-maybe we just missed it?", offered Fish weakly.

"Don't be stupid! There's no way we would miss a fucking corpse!", rebutted Snot, "It was right there and besides, WE looked EVERYWHERE for the body! And it never once turned up!"

"Yeah... Flynn's right. The only odd thing we found was **\*\*that Monobear Bracelet at the Obstacle Course Room\*\***, but aside from that, we didn't find Elsa's body anywhere...", said Punzie, dejectedly.

Hic instantly perked up at that. "Say... Now that you mention it... That bracelet being there is pretty weird...", he closed his eyes, deep in thought, before staring intently at the Ultimate Thief. "You said this was **\*\*Elsa's bracelet\*\***, didn't you Flynn? Why do you think that, again?"

Flynn looked like he had been caught off guard, but he quickly recovered. "Well, it has to be, no? I mean, all of us still have it on-"

"Wrong!", yelled Mer, showing off her bare wrist. "Mine fell already!"

"Mine did too, by the way.", I added. Flynn didn't look like he was amused, and with an annoyed huff, he continued to speak.

"\_Anyways... \_most of us still have them on, and the only other bracelets that were on the Gym were Anna's and the Twins', right? But those bracelets are still with them... And yet, this one wasn't near any of them... and since Elsa's body had disappeared along with her bracelet... well, it's only natural to think that, no?", explained Flynn.

And he did have a point... according to Hic and the others, the only Monobear Bracelet that was missing from all the victims was Elsa's. So this had to be it, right? But still, that didn't exactly solve the main problem:

"What the hell was that bracelet doing there?"

No one had an answer to my question. Well, at least not a concrete one.

"The only thing I can think of is... maybe the killer dropped it when moving Elsa's body?", suggested Fish.

"But why would the killer bother with moving the bracelet?", asked Tooth, confusion showing on her face. "I mean, we all knew Elsa was dead by that point, so there was no reason to take it..."

"...Unless... the bracelet \_had \_to be taken.", said Pitch all of a sudden, his gaze sharp. "That is most likely the reason why it had to be taken with the body."

"So... you're saying the bracelet is a clue?", asked Punzie, suddenly perking up.

"Then...! We should look at that damn thing right now!", said Snot in what was his speaking voice, shouting at full volume. "Maybe the answers to everything are there!"

"Then, I shall now present...!", spoke up Monobear, who then proceeded to jump into the middle of the room, right in the space in the middle of the circular space left by the booths. "As always, it is up to me to bring up evidence for you guys. You're welcome!" and after finishing his gloating, the Headmaster unceremoniously dropped all the bracelets involved in the murders on the floor.

I immediately jumped over my booth and kneeled down to look at them, shivering a little when my knee made contact with the frozen over floor. I could feel the coldness through the fabric of my jeans. Ignoring the cold, I decided to focus on the bracelets in front of me and... almost instantly, I noticed something... \_off.\_ I gingerly picked up the bracelet that I assumed Flynn was talking about and showed it to him. "Yo, Flynn... is this the one you guys found?"

Punzie and the Ultimate Thief nodded instantly. "Yup, no doubt about it. That's the one."

"Yeah, we found it as \*\*soon as we all separated and Monobear unlocked the doors\*\*. It was just there lying on the floor... \*\*no one else\*\* was in the room and no one else came in while we were there aside from Hiccup and Peter...", commented the Ultimate Painter offhandedly.

So... it had to be dropped there by the killer and no one else. Still, that isn't what is concerning me. I could feel everyone's gazes as I studied the bracelet in my hand. No matter how you slice it, there's something very weird about this bracelet, especially if we compare it to the crime scene it supposedly belongs to. I may be wrong about this, but... here goes nothing!

"Hey, guys... don't you think this bracelet is weird?", I asked, hoping to start a discussion.

"Dude, everything that comes from Monobear is weird.", said Snot with a roll of his eyes.

I'll... ignore that, thank you very much Snotlout. I gave him a deadpan glare and then moved on.

"What I was trying to point out is... isn't this bracelet, Elsa's bracelet... \*\*a little too bloody\*\*?"

Punzie tilted her head. "Why is that weird? I mean... that thing was... n-near a crime scene with blood and everything, right? So its totally fine for it to be smeared with blood."

I shook my head. "But, if you look at the place where Elsa died... you'll notice its the least bloody of all the scenes. Hell, if you compare to the Twins' scene, its much less bloody! And they died similarly!"

"So? What are you suggesting here, Overland?", asked Pitch curtly, his eyes intent on me. "Are you suggesting this is not Elsa's bracelet?"

The silence that followed was one of affirmation from my part and one of expectation from the others, waiting for my answer. As soon as I nodded, a lot of things happened. Hic carefully climbed over his booth and joined me in the center of the room and started to examine the bracelets in the floor, while the rest of the group exploded into confused outrage.

"Are ya daft, Jack?!", asked Merida, "I mean, whose bracelet could it be possibly be?! Haven't you been hearin'? All the others are where they belong! This one has to be Elsa's! No doubt!"

"But Jack is right.", spoke up Hic, earning everyone's attention. He was holding another bracelet in his hand, his eyes scanning it carefully. It was Anna's bracelet. "It's just too weird... Elsa's bracelet is too dirty for such a low amount of blood drawn, and...", the green eyed teen trailed off as he stood up and showed Anna's bracelet to everyone, his face serious. "It's not the only bracelet that is weird... Anna's bracelet is also \*\*too clean\*\*..."

Pitch's eyes narrowed. "The amount of blood in the Pool Room was quite substantial... Hmm, I see... yes, I get what you are trying to point out.", he nodded mostly to himself. "I agree with Haddock... and Overland. These discrepancies merit some looking into."

"What discrepancies?!", argued Flynn, "Look, you guys are just looking for things that aren't there! What the fuck does "too clean" and "too dirty" even mean?! Why is that important?"

"Come on, Flynn, don't you see?", I said as I shook the bracelet in my hand in front of him, "If these bracelets were really found in the places they were, they should match the state of those rooms! And yet, it's not like that at all!"

"So... does that mean, the bracelets... have been switched?", asked Tooth, looking unsure.

...Does it mean that? It's odd, if you think about it, but its the only way to explain these weird circumstances. I nodded at the

Ultimate Dentist, who looked legitimately shocked by this revelation, like everyone else did. But I really don't think anyone can deny th-

"Hold on a minute!"

...Of course Flynn would freaking object.

"All of this you're saying doesn't mean anything! Sure, it's a little odd that the bracelets don't exactly match the circumstances of the places they were found...! But still, that doesn't mean they were switched or something!"

"Uh... for the record, there's nothing wrong with the Twins' bracelets.", interjected Hic, "T-the only bracelets were doubting and that we think were switched are Anna's and Elsa's-"

"But like \_I was saying\_", interrupted Flynn and I suddenly wanted to chuck something at him. "You don't have any conclusive proof of that! You're just saying that on an assumption!"

Hic looked deep in thought as he lowered his gaze back to the bracelet in his hand. And then... a grin appeared on his freckled face. I couldn't help but to smile too. Had he... figured something out?

"But I have conclusive proof."

"You... you do...?"

I had to laugh. The way Flynn sputtered and fell silent was too funny. Even Punzie snickered a little. Man, that got to hurt his pride a lot. I kind of feel bad now... No, not really.

Hic nodded earnestly before showing off the bracelet in his hand once again... or rather, the inside of the bracelet this time. And then, I could see what he was trying to say. But I didn't... quite get what he was pointing out, so I let him do the talking. "The needles in Anna's bracelet are the proof that this one doesn't belong to her and that it was switched."

Apparently, I wasn't the only one who was confused by this. Judging by the looks he was getting, most of us weren't following Hic's findings at all.

"I don't get it. Why are the needles proof?", asked Snot as he scratched his head.

Hic brought the bracelet near to his face as he studied the needles with interest. "Do you guys remember how these things work? What are they used for?"

Fish nodded. "According to the Headmaster, the Monobear Bracelets have these needles built into them that can pop out at any moment's notice to \*\*inject us with the Despair-Syndrome and the cure for it\*\*."

"Yeah, and when they inject you they leave these nasty little marks on your wrists.", I added, showing off my wrist and the marks that looked like snake bites. Hic looked like he was in pain for an

instant as he looked at my wrist but the look disappeared as he proceeded on to explain.

"Right. So it stands to reason that the needles on the bracelet stay out even after it falls off..."

Mer nodded. "Yah, I remember that when my bracelet fell off, those darn needles were still out. Gave me a fright when I first saw 'em..."

"So...", interrupted Pitch, "What is your point, Haddock?"

Hic looked ready to oblige. "My point... is this... \*\*why are the needles of Anna's bracelet out?\*\* She never had the Despair-Syndrome and she obviously was never cured... so why is her bracelet like this?"

...Oh.

...What?! Wait, hold on... what does that-?

"What are you saying, kid?", asked Flynn, looking flustered. "I don't exactly follow... are you saying that this bracelet doesn't belong to Anna, simply because it has its needles out?!"

"No, wait, it makes sense.", interrupted Tooth, her mind gears obviously working in overdrive, "What Hiccup is saying is true! Anna was completely healthy and was never afflicted with the disease so there should be no reason for her bracelet to have the needles out! \*\*This can't be Anna's bracelet\*\*!"

"B-but what if Anna had been infected and we didn't know? I mean, no one saw her after we dispersed from the gym...", suggested Fishlegs.

"No, I don't think so.", argued Hic. "When I checked her body, she didn't have any marks on her wrist. The Twins, obviously, had them... so we can assume that all people with the disease had the marks on their wrists."

"So... if Anna was never infected... then why the fuck are the needles on her bracelet out?", asked Snotlout.

"It's because... this isn't Anna's bracelet at all. This must be someone else's...", I said, getting a little tired from explaining this to him.

"The state of the bracelets... are too disparaging. We must accept that these bracelets have indeed been switched. What we thought was Elsa's bracelet, the one that is too dirty and was found in the Obstacle Course room, is actually Anna's bracelet... and the one we thought was Anna's bracelet, the one that was too clean, had its needles out and was found in the Pool Room... is actually Elsa's.", said Pitch with such conviction that left no room for doubt.

"But what if it's the Twins'?!", asked Flynn, still not giving up. "I mean, their bracelets had needles out too, right? So what if we just mixed them up?!"

Hic immediately shook his head. "Counting the Twins' bracelets, there

are three with their needles out. There's no way all three of them belonged to Tuff and Ruff. There is no denying it."

"But do you realize what this implies?", challenged the Ultimate Thief, jabbing a pointing finger at the smaller teen. "If what you're saying is true and the bracelet with its needles out does belong to Elsa... you're saying she had the Despair-Syndrome?!"

It's true... if you connect all the facts... that's what it appears to be.

"Well, we never did find Elsa's body to check if she had the marks like the rest of the infected...", commented Tooth.

"But why?!", demanded to know Flynn, looking on edge. "I still don't get it! Why is there so much contrived crap into this?! Why hide Elsa's body?! Why even switch the bracelets?! I don't understand why the Blackened is doing all of this! What are they trying to hide...?!"

"Hmm..." I hummed, trying to make a sense of all this. It was as Flynn said: Too much was put into this scheme, and almost none of it made sense. Was that the Blackened's goal? To confuse us? "Well... the bracelets were switched... so we wouldn't find out that Elsa had the Despair-Syndrome... that's what I think."

"And Elsa's body was also moved so that we wouldn't find that out... and so that we wouldn't find out more clues that might led to her killer...", added Tooth.

"I cannot believe we are even spending time spelling this out.", huffed Pitch as he glared at Flynn. "It should be obvious to you that the Blackened did all of this to throw us off. The moving of Elsa's body and the switching of the bracelets prove this. What we should be doing instead of wasting time on this inane fit of yours, Rider, is try to figure out how the body was moved and by who."

Pitch had a point there. We had already explained off a lot of things but it all came back to this. The core issue: the disappearance of Elsa's body. Even yet, I still had no idea how to explain that. We had been debating so long about other aspects of the crime in hopes that doing so would reveal a hint, an answer to this particular one. And yet, nothing. Judging by the silence, none of us had anything to explain \_that\_ mystery.

A body that we all saw. A body that was moved while all of us who **\*\*were alive\*\*** were together in the same room. A body that managed to disappear under these seemingly impossible circumstances.

"So... we still don't have nothin'?", asked Mer, looking at all of us expectantly.

"Nope. Nothing here.", seriously, Snotlout, can't you be more worried about this?

"Well... what if we throw around ideas and suggestions, then?", said Tooth, "Maybe one of them will be on the mark?"

That seemed like a good idea. It's better than what we have right now... which is nothing.

"Then I'll start!", shouted Snot suddenly. "What if it got \*\*abducted by aliens\*\*!"... No, I'm pretty sure that one is wrong. I'm starting to have second thoughts about this idea.

"Hmm... maybe the body was \*\*hid in the Freezer\*\*?", suggested Punzie. I think that's a very nice idea! But according to Hic, that thing was frozen shut and it was kept like that during the investigation. There's no way the culprit could have melted the ice, put in Elsa's body and then freeze it over like that in such a short amount of time.

"Maybe the body is hidden \*\*outside the gym\*\*!", proposed Tooth. I think that's the most likely scenario... but the problem is... all of us were together. No one could have moved the body as long as that problem persists.

All of these ideas, save Snot's, sounded pretty good but none of them addressed the main issue: how could the body have been moved without any of us intervening? Well... the only way I can think of is...\_that\_. But its too stupid! The whole notion is extremely idiotic and though I don't mind making a fool out of myself for the laughter of everyone, this is a little bit more serious! Still, we're supposed to be saying whatever comes to mind... so might as well, no?

"This is just a thought, but...", I instinctively started to scratch the top of my head, "what if the \*\*body... moved itself\*\*? I mean, that's the only way I could see this pulled off..." I said, trying to laugh at the absurdity of my proposal.

Naturally, no one else laughed. The silence that followed my proposal was like a tight vice-grip, tense and empty. It was Flynn's voice who finally cut the silence, thankfully. Unfortunately... he didn't seem too happy about my suggestion.

"Jack, do you even hear what you're saying?! How in the devil fucking dickens is a body supposed to move itself? Are you saying Elsa turned into a zombie or something?"

The nervous smile that I gave him only seemed to infuriate him more. And yep, the shrug I gave also made him flare his nostrils. But what can I say? It's the only thing that made sense to me. Of course, it was going to be wrong bu-

"Hold... Hold on.", as soon as Hic spoke up, I stared intently at him. Well, all of us did. Judging by the odd look in his face, the Ultimate Lucky Student seemed to be thinking about something really hard. All of a sudden, Hic had to lean on his booth, a hand on his forehead. He looked... conflicted? What was going on in that mind of his?

Letting strands of auburn hair fall over his forehead as he removed his hand, he looked at all of us before resting his gaze on me. I could see it in those emerald greens of his; Hic had an idea. With trembling lips, the fishbone viking began to speak:

"I don't think... Jack is wrong. In fact... I think he's spot on: The only way the body could have been moved is... if the body moved by itself."



"SO YOU'RE SAYING WE HAVE A ZOMBIE IN OUR MIDST?!", screeched Fish, rupturing some eardrums, for sure.

"I-If we have a zombie, then I propose we sacrifice Fishlegs! That oughta keep the Elsbombie occupied!", yelled out Snotlout.

"No, you utter buffoons.", chastised Pitch, "What Haddock and Overland are saying is that there **was** never a body to begin with"; Elsa was very much alive and pretended to be dead when we first found her... is that correct?", he asked, his gaze lingering on both of us. Well... I wasn't actually thinking that far... but judging by Hiccup's firm nod, I guess he thought that? Well, good for me, I guess!

"B-but that's ridiculous!", continued on Flynn, "I mean, we saw her dead body! Elsa was undoubtedly dead!"

"Weeelll...", interjected Fish, "It's true that we saw her dead body... but we never really confirmed that she was dead because her corpse disappeared so-"

"That doesn't matter!", interrupted Flynn, "I mean, we don't really need to confirm it! Monobear confirmed it for us! **He** played the Body Discovery Announcement **for** her body!"

"Yeah, I mean... Don't get me wrong guys...", began Tooth as she cast a doubtful look towards Hic and I. "I know the problem we're facing right now seems impossible, but that doesn't mean it's OK to just blurt out ridiculous stuff and play along with it..."

...Hey! You didn't say anything when Snot proposed his dumb theory!

"But it's not ridiculous.", insisted Hic, "In fact, I think I can prove it...", he said, stuttering and looking unsure before shaking his head. "No, I definitely can prove it.", the auburn haired teen stared at Flynn as he spoke. "And the proof is... in the **Body Discovery Announcements**."

"Try to remember.", he began as he chewed on the nail on his thumb, his face a weird mix of concentration and realization; if I didn't know Hic I'd think he was winging it as he went. "The **number** of Body Discovery Announcements... There was one back when Snotlout discovered Anna's body... and there was another one when we discovered the Twins' body... but...**we** didn't hear one when Elsa's body was found**."**

Well... I don't exactly remember that, owing to the fact that I wasn't entirely lucid during those events but... judging by everyone's faces... it seems Hic is right.

"B-but that can easily be explained by the fact that maybe w-we just found Elsa's body and the Twins' at the same time. M-maybe Monobear simply fused the two announcements into one because of that?", argued Flynn, looking very unsure about his theory.

"HEY! Don't you dare insinuate that I'm the kind of lazy bear who does things half-assed!", yelled Monobear, his sharp claws out and looking ready to maul someone. "What kind of rude bear do you think I

am? Sure, I may only make announcements when the body of a \*\*student\*\* is found, but each of my students are precious and I make an announcement \*\*whenever you find a dead student\*\*, no exceptions!"

Monobear paused before blushing, a paw going to the back of his head in a bashful display. "Oops! Man, that's the third hint I give in this Class Trial unintentionally. I guess that's part of my character! I heard clumsy helpful characters are in hot demand these days!"

...Ignoring Monobear's rambling... "Looks like that confirms it.", I said, giving Flynn my best condescending smile. "We're really missing one Body Discovery Announcement... and that was Elsa's."

The Ultimate Thief had no rebuttals. Punzie, however, looked like she had at least one.

"But even if the lack of a Body Discovery Announcement is suspect... how do we explain the bracelet? I mean... if I recall correctly:"

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Here's how this will work!", continues the Headmaster, no doubt enjoying our shared shock, "At random intervals of time which I will not disclose, these bracelets' needles will pop out and inject you guys with the disease! This will continue to happen until someone kills! But don't worry... the bracelets will inject the infected with the cure once a killing happens, and then they will harmlessly pop off from everyone!"<em>

\_"Other than that, there's no way to remove the bracelets. Well... they will also drop off if your heart stops... but really, who would kill themselves to get rid of it when you can do it as easily by offing someone else? Puhuhuhu..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>"...That's how Monobear explained the working behind the bracelets right? I remember Elsa's bracelet being off when we found her body so... how do we explain that? If she isn't really dead, then why did the bracelet fall off?", finished Punzie.<p>

Hic closes his eyes to think but before the Ultimate Lucky Student can offer an explanation, Tooth cuts in eagerly.

"Wait... I think I know how she have removed that bracelet!"

Snotlout lifted an eyebrow. "Oh? Really? And what is this magical and secret way to remove it that none of us know about?"

The Ultimate Dentist pouted. "But I did tell Hiccup and Peter how to remove it. It's really simple. All you need to do to remove the bracelet is to \*\*block the electric signals sent from your heart so that it can't reach the bracelet.\*\*"

"OK, was I the only one who didn't follow that? Because I didn't get it.", said Flynn with an annoyed glare. I... I also didn't get it, but I'm not admitting to it.

Tooth huffed. "Look, this is all speculation on my part, but allow me to explain. You guys know how the bracelet is supposed to fall off when your heart stops beating, right?", we all nod in answer. "Well, I think the way the bracelet works is like this: When our heart beats, it sends electric signals through our body, they're faint but they exist. The bracelet detects them and that's how it knows when to fall off; if it can't detect any signals, it falls off."

"Ooh! Like one of those heart rate monitor thingies from the medical dramas my mum watches!", says Mer excitedly.

"So, you're saying Elsa somehow figured that out and found a way to block those signals to fake her death?", asked Flynn, "C'mon, how long are you going to insist on this crazy theory of yours, kid?"

Hic, however, didn't back down at Flynn's comment. In fact, he seemed to be spurred on further. "It's not a crazy theory! Well... OK, yeah, it seems pretty unreal to all of us that Elsa is still alive... but that only goes to show that she planned this very well! She fooled us all into believing that she was dead! And... she even fooled the bracelet using **the aluminum foil we found in the Combat Room!**"

...Aluminum foil?

"That thing?", asked Flynn, unimpressed, "Isn't that just trash? That's your evidence?"

Before I could tell Flynn to put a sock in it, Fishlegs intervened. "No, actually... that makes perfect sense! **Aluminum foil has the ability to bounce back signals to their source**, effectively preventing them from reaching the thing they're wrapping... it's a very good reflector."

"Yeah! That's why they tell you to never put aluminum foil in the microwave, right?", said Mer, to which Fish nodded.

"And this was found in the crime scene, right Hiccup?", continued the Ultimate Encyclopedia and when Hic confirmed it, along with the fact that it had been found in the same place where Elsa's body had been, Fish nodded to himself. "Then... I think the theory that Elsa was very much alive and used this to take off her bracelet to make us believe she was dead is pretty much confirmed..."

I didn't exactly understand all the things Fish said, but I got the gist of it. All Elsa had to do was wrap her bracelet with this aluminum thing and the electric signals the bracelet needed to work would not reach it, and it would fall off. Yeah, that seems right.

And yet, its so surreal. I... I don't know how to feel about this. The evidence is here; We have enough reason to believe that Elsa faked her death. And yet... I actually felt sad about this! I didn't exactly like Elsa for being mean to Hic, but dying like this...? I wouldn't ever wish this on anyone! And yet she went and not only toyed with out emotions... but she went and toyed with the lives of others... of her own sister!

That's... that's what I'm feeling. Anger and betrayal. How could she do all of this...?! How could she do this to her own sister?!

Pitch sighs. "I understand if some of you are still refusing to believe the fact that Elsa is indeed still alive. To be honest, I too had a hard time believing this... but the evidence is in front of us. Denying it any longer would be foolish. This makes her the most likely suspect too."

"Oh yeah...", said Mer as she brought a hand to her chin, rubbing it thoughtfully, "Since she was pretendin' to be dead, that means she was actually alive all along and she was the one who switched the bracelets!"

"But that doesn't make her the killer, though...", said Tooth. "I mean, sure, I think she's very suspicious... but is there really any proof that makes her the mastermind in this case? She could have been just a lucky survivor..."

That is true... but something inside of me tells me that that's not all there is to it. Why would she remain hidden? Why would she mess with the evidence? No, she's definitely more than an innocent survivor... And judging by the harsh look on Hic's face and Pitch's furrowed brow, I'm not alone on this.

"No, she's definitely more than a lucky survivor." began Hic. "Especially if you start to think... how did she vanish from the crime scene?"

"Well... we were all in the lobby and we obviously didn't see her come out from the Combat Room at all...", began Fish.

"Oh! I got it! All the rooms in this gym have doors that lead to the neighboring rooms, right? So she could have used those doors and made her way around the gym! I'm pretty sure the side doors in the Pool Room and the Obstacle Course lead to the hallway that leads outside the gym!", explained Punzie eagerly.

"There is a catch, though.", interjected Tooth. "Those doors work like the rest of the doors in the Gym... meaning you can only open the doors in those rooms with the given eHandbook. Could Elsa really have escaped like that? According to the Loan Registry, she would only have access to the Combat Room eHandbook..."

For what I feel like its the hundredth time, I consult my ElectroID and look at the Loan Registry, just to verify that my memory isn't failing me:

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Monobuff Gym eHandbook Loan Registry:<strong>

\*\* - THE Snotlout - Heavy Lifting Room\*\*

\*\* - Elsa - Combat Room\*\*

\*\* - TUFF - Olympic Pool Room\*\*

\*\* - RUFF - Combat Room\*\*

**\*\*Anna Arendelle - Olympic Pool Room\*\***

**\*\*REA - VIP\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p>...And it's true. Elsa only had access to the Combat Room. Tooth raised a valid point. However, upon looking at this Registry once more... I feel like I finally have an idea of what happened... Yeah!<p>

"Waaaait a minute.", I start, "Sure, this Loan Registry shows us that Elsa only had the Combat Room eHandbook... but what if she also had the VIP eHandbook... Guys, what if she's **\*\*this REA person?\*\***!"

The shocked expression on everyone's faces feels so good. Hic snaps out of it quickly, and then grins at me. "Of course! That would be the only way she could have hidden from us, anyway! She would have needed an eHandbook that allowed her to elude us completely and the only one that could possibly do that is the VIP eHandbook!"

"But didn't Monobear over there said that we could only borrow one eHandbook per person?", asked Flynn.

"Well... he did say that... but... he never specified whether that applied to the normal eHandbooks only... or if it applied to both the normal and VIP eHandbooks.", mumbled Fish.

"And I must GASP! Geez... I can't believe you guys just noticed that intentional loophole just now! Even the Blackened noticed it preeeeetty quickly, y'know?", teased the Headmaster, a paw behind his head, that odious grin of his at full force.

"So... this confirms it. A person can both hold a normal and the VIP eHandbook at the same time. Minute by minute, the evidence and suspicion against Elsa keeps mounting.", said Pitch with a confident smile.

"But I don't get it! Why are you guys saying this REA person and Elsa are the same?! I mean, REA isn't even close to that chick's name!", said Snot, obviously some steps behind. Punzie seemed eager to explain however, so she fielded this one.

"Oh, Snotlout! Don't you see? REA **\*\*is an acronym for Elsa's name\*\***!", explained the blonde with a patient smile. Seeing how the Ultimate Heavy Lifter still held a confused look, the Ultimate Painter kept talking. "An acronym is usually a sequence of letters formed by the initials of a phrase or sentence. It's used a lot in names for organizations and things like that! REA, for example, is an acronym for Elsa's name; specifically her initials!"

Punzie enthusiastically brought out a piece of paper from her pocket and wrote down the acronym clearly for all of us to see. "See, I didn't instantly see it because she used a very weird way to write the acronym but once Jack spoke up I remembered the various rules I read about them!"

**\* \* \***

><p>REA<p>

Elsa of Arendelle

\*\*REA\*\*

\*\*E\*\*lsa of \*\*AR\*\*endelle

\*\*EAR\*\*

\*\*REA\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"This is what REA really stands for!", finished Punzie enthusiastically. Judging by Snotlout's expression, he didn't seem to really get it but at least he seems convinced.<p>

"That was a very clever way to hide her identity.", mused Fish, "As long as it was related to our name... yeah, it follows Monobear's rule."

"And just like Fishlegs said before... the most suspicious person was the one who held the VIP eHandbook... Hmm...", trailed off Flynn.

"Does this mean... does this mean we've got it?", said Mer, her eyes wide with disbelief, "Have we cornered the real murderer this time around? The one awful person who orchestrated this whole darn thing?"

No one dared to answer. I understood why, though. There was this intense pressure in this moment. It all seemed so final and yet daring to take that last step... to take responsibility for the entire thing. What if we were actually wrong despite how convinced we were that we were in the right? That's why no one dared to speak up.

...

"Once... Once I go over the entire sequence of this crime... I...", said Hic, his eyes alight with an unearthly confidence, one that had decided to take charge and responsibility for everything that happened and that would happen. "I'll make everything clear and leave no trace of doubt that... she was the true mastermind behind these events! I'll prove it!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Everything falls into place...<em>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup's POV<strong>

"It's really hard to imagine that all of this was planned by one person. This complicated web of happenings and murders... they really were set into motion by the True Blackened. My guess is that it all started back when Snotlout announced that he was going to work out at the Gym on the night the murders happened. That gave the Blackened someone to pin the blame of their crimes. And I also think it gave

them their basis for their plan. A plan that would utilize anyone and anything available for them.

First, the culprit needed to lure in the actors needed for her plan to succeed. At first, I wondered why the Blackened had to bring forth so many people, but now I understand. She needed to bring at least three more people so that they could gain access to the VIP eHandbook. After all, Monobear said he wouldn't give it away unless the five normal eHandbooks had been loaned first. Snotlout and the Blackened had already borrowed one each, therefore, they needed three more people at the scene. Those three extras would be Anna, and the Twins: Tuff and Ruff.

The Blackened lured Anna with a note. I think the reason Anna even did as the note said was because... she had received it from someone she trusted. However, she didn't know that she was being lured in towards her death and got an eHandbook for the Pool Room and did as the note told her. But the Blackened wasn't going to be the one to dirty their hands with her blood. Though the culprit had orchestrated her death by luring her to a specific place, the Pool Room, the culprit was going to deal death using... someone else.

Due to their strain of Despair-Syndrome, the Gullible Disease, the Twins were liable to do as they were told as long as they were given an excuse. That excuse... came in the shape of a note written to them by the Blackened, in which they were ordered to kill Anna using the icicle the True Blackened had set up for them in the Combat Room's Freezer. Having gotten two eHandbooks for the very purpose of pulling off this killing, the Twins... murdered Anna as they had been instructed. Since this portion of the plan was too complex and it wasn't described on the note, I'm guessing the Blackened and the Twins planned to discuss this. Most likely after the Blackened took them from the hospital for this murder plan.

Having killed Anna... the Blackened moved on to the next step of their plan. In order to secure their way out and to further jumble up the events of this Class Trial, the Blackened betrayed the Twins and killed them with their own metal bat, but not after receiving the goods from them: what I now believe to be the aluminum foil. The Twins... probably died without knowing they'd be betrayed. The Blackened probably killed them to cover their tracks as well; someone with the Gullible Disease would surely babble under pressure.

Having finished their murder, the True Blackened moved on to the final steps of her plan: securing an alibi. And to do that, they put on a sordid performance: faking their own death. By making us see a "murder scene" where they themselves were the victim, they managed to secure a tight alibi that would have shifted all suspicions away from them. However, this secure alibi would also prove to be their downfall, because once the investigation started... we would find out that she had never died all along. We would have found out that she had removed her bracelet using the aluminum foil. For this very reason, the Blackened had to "disappear her own corpse", she had to hide the evidence. All evidence of her involvement in this crime. This is why she also switched the bracelets, to hide all clues that pointed towards them suspiciously.

I still don't know the reasons behind all of their actions, their motivations, and why it was so important for them to switch the bracelets... but there's only one person who fits all the

characteristics... only one person who would benefit from this hiding of evidence and involvement, only one person who Anna would trust enough to do as she was told... only one person who could have moved a seemingly impossible to move corpse... and the only one person who was there, that night, who could have pulled this off... is the True Blackened, the Ultimate Figure Skater, Elsa Arendelle!"

\* \* \*

><p>I took a deep breath after finishing that speech. It was over. With this, the Class Trial would be finished. And yet, I felt antsy. Unsure. Everything fit... the evidence didn't lie, and yet, I was still unsure. Because like I had told everyone else, I didn't understand the motivations behind this murder, this plot. I couldn't even begin to understand what transpired through Elsa's mind that pushed her to do this. In past cases, I could see why the Blackeneds... our friends, acted like this. But in this one? I couldn't associate the motive with the Blackened. I couldn't.<p>

Apparently, the feeling was general. A rather still silence filled the court room. It was over, right? So... why did it feel like it hadn't? What did we need to do for this to conclude satisfactorily, if it could even end like that?

Flynn scratched his neck, his brow furrowed with an unsure expression, "So uh... what are we supposed to do now?"

"Should we... start votin' or somethin'?", asked Merida with reluctance written on her face.

"Yep! That's riiight! I mean, Hiccy even went and gave his little spiel that no one in their right mind would ever bother to hear, so its time for the Ballot Time, puhuhuhu!", said Monobear with a gleeful and distasteful laugh.

"But can we even vote for a person that isn't here?", asked Fishlegs as he eyed his booth unsure, the touch pad installed on them lighting up and showing again the list of names, ready to accept our inputs for the Ballot Time.

"Offfff course! Everyone has to answer to their crimes eventually! No matter how much one runs away from your sins, you must one day face them! How about that? Pretty cool and zen sounding, huh?", explained or rather rambled Monobear, a paw behind his back. "Now then, who will be chosen as the Blackened? Will you guys make the right choice, or the dreadfully wroooooong one? Puhuhuhu! Such heart-pounding excitement!"

There wasn't anything remotely close to excitement as we cast our votes. I couldn't deny the fact that my heart was pounding with nervousness as the final vote was cast and the usual fanfare occurred, the slot machine that would decide our fates spinning and spinning its slots until eventually they stopped. With a cheering crowd and confetti and applause, the contraption revealed that our answer had indeed been correct; Elsa had been the Blackened, the one behind all of this, before receding back into the floor, leaving no trace of ever there being a machine in the room. And just like always, the cheerful and jovial atmosphere it forced into the room made us all feel uncomfortable. It was as if someone had decided to



throw a party at a funeral.

"Man, three on a row?! You guys are on a roll! Hahahaha, I bet you guys are pretty glad about that, huh? Not that you guys had much of a choice... You pretty much had to get it right! Nyahahahaha!"

Monobear's comments were also always out of place. Thankfully... no one paid attention to that. Some of us were still processing the fact that we had been correct. I couldn't blame it for them. It all felt so unbelievable. We were so dazed by the fact that we were correct that we didn't even comment on the fact that the rest of the Monobear Bracelets had fallen off from the ones who still had them.

"So everything the freakshows and Hiccup were saying... was actually right?!", exclaimed Snotlout breathlessly. "Elsa... she really was behind everything?! She was the Blackened?!"

"I can't believe this! She lied to us!", yelled Merida, angry and quivering with rage, "She made us think she was dead and all just to fool us and get us killed!"

"Quite honestly, that is not what is the most upsetting to me.", mused Peter before staring at the Headmaster with pure scorn. "It really is quite worrying, that our captor is willing to break the rules of their own game."

Monobear jolted. "Moi? Break the rules? Why, what could you possibly be talking about, Pitchy?"

The Ultimate Fear Expert didn't break eye contact with the plush who was pretending to act all innocent. "I am talking about the fact that you intervened in this case. You said you were not going to help anyone in their murder plans, that you were going to be an impartial judge. Yet you deliberately helped the Blackened in this case. And there is evidence of that."

"Oh yeah... for one, Elsa is not here!", said Tooth, joining Peter on his assault. "The rules of the Camp say that \*\*everyone still alive needs to be in the Class Trial\*\*! But Elsa was not here at all, even though she is still alive!"

"...All to hide that fact. Monobear was covering for her!", finished Rapunzel.

...But now that I think about it... that wasn't the only thing that was off about this Class Trial.

"There was... also something else that strikes me as odd...", I said as I flipped through the pages of evidence stored in my ElectroID. "The Monobear File this time around was weird... I mean, when you read the entry related to Anna and the Twins... you will notice they are pretty gruesome and fatal wounds. But... when you read Elsa's wounds... I can't be the only one who thinks that a simple bruise to the head isn't enough to kill someone, right?"

"Now that you mention it...!", said Fishlegs as his eyes widened.

"But then, why the fuck was Elsa even included in the file if she

didn't really die?!", asked Snotlout in an expected outburst of confusion.

"To make us assume that Elsa had indeed been killed.", answered Peter. "Monobear deliberately inserted her on the Monobear File to confuse us. He knew Elsa wasn't really dead and he still included her on it. He gave us false information to aid the Blackened... a clear violation of the rules."

Under the pressure and stares, Monobear actually began to squirm a little. "H-Hey...! Don't you guys get tired of jumping to conclusions?! I-I mean... what was I supposed to do, huh? This was the **\*\*first time in the history of all the Class Trials ever held\*\*** where a Blackened decided to play with the structure of the Class Trial like this! There was no way I wasn't going to lend a helping paw to make things more interesting! I-It's kind of like when you see a fire and you just have the urge to throw flammable stuff at it, y'know?! Don't you get me?!"

No... I don't think I "get" you, but this basically confirms Peter's claims. Monobear really DID break his own rules this time. I... don't know how to feel about this. Monobear following his own rules was our only guarantee in this godsforsaken land of murder and deceit and now that was being thrown into the wind? On a whim?

"Beeeesides... I didn't really break the rules, see?", defended Monobear with a pouty face and crossed arms. "Like... sure, I included Elsy's name in the Monobear File along with the other dead bozos... but like Hiccy pointed out, **\*\*I never really said in the file that she was dead\*\***\_\_!\_ See, it isn't my fault if you guys assumed that! If you bastards had read the file more closely, you would have figured out that she wasn't dead! So its not my fault!"

"What, so its our fault?!", said Merida with outrage.

"Like hell it is! Don't try to pin the blame on us you motherfucker!", shouted the Ultimate Heavy Lifter.

Monobear as usual ignored him and continued speaking. "A-and Toothy said that I had broken the rule of mandatory attendance to the Class Trial just to hide the fact that Elsy was alive... but you see, while the rule says all alive students must attend the Class Trial... the rule doesn't say that the person must be in the courtroom itself! So...! See? No rules broken! Just a lil' good ol' bending of them but not full blown breaking! See?! I'm still as innocent as the pure white cotton inside me!"

"That's got to be the most weaksauce excuse I've ever heard.", said Flynn, clearly unimpressed. I shared that sentiment. And I was feeling uneasy by these claims. Monobear was starting to act weird. This motive and the bending of the rules... were unnatural. For someone who had decided to not be that involved... he was sure pushing our hand more and more and playing a bigger part on each case. But why? What had made Monobear act like this, now?

"Wait a second... what did you mean by... "the rule doesn't say that the person must be in the courtroom?", asked Rapunzel, latching on to the Headmaster's words.

"Are you saying... that Elsa is here, right now?", asked Jack, his icy blue eyes staring at the Headmaster with a cold intensity.

"Ayup! She is! She has been on a neighboring room this whole time, watching this entire Class Trial, hearing you guys debate and drone on and on about everything! She was "present" in the Class Trial... but she wasn't really participating, so to speak!", said Monobear as he nodded to himself, as if the entire thing made sense for him. "But I'm afraid it's time for some... Puhuhu... Class Participation!"

The Headmaster stood up and at the same time, a button similar to the one he pressed to carry out his demented executions rose from the floor. "Yes, she has been merely observing but I think its high time the Blackened, the little star of this little drama circle, showed up for all of us! So, please, give her a round of applause! For Elsa Arendelle, the Ultimate Figure Skater and the Blackened that almost had you all fooled! Let's make this a memorable welcome!"

My heartbeat accelerated as the Headmaster pressed the button with gleeful abandon. Soon enough, a door behind Monobear's throne opened slowly. A maw of darkness. That sight made me nervous, and I didn't understand why. There was nothing to be afraid of. I already knew what was going to come out from there, and still my heart wouldn't slow down. Was this... dread? Anticipation...? I pondered those thoughts even as I heard the clacking of heels that came from that door. Even as I saw that familiar blue dress. Even as I recognized the face of Elsa Arendelle as she walked into the courtroom with complete confidence.

But no matter how much I mulled these feelings of fear and anticipation that were swirling on my chest, I couldn't make any sense of it.

We had solved every mystery in this murder case. We had unveiled the Blackened's identity. We should be at ease, at even so... I couldn't even begin to understand anything. Not even the person who was responsible for all of this.

I didn't understand this at all.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>bifurcate POV\_HJ [Hiccup\_POV, Jack\_POV];<strong>

It was as if she had been revived. Her beautiful light blue dress and her silver hair were stained with blood, but she was very much alive.

Despite the fact that I had been the one that said it, I couldn't quite process the fact that Elsa Arendelle was walking towards us, taking her place on the booth that was normally assigned to her.

"I can't believe it... the fishbone was right once again!", exclaimed Snotlout, his sight pinned on the smirking Ultimate Figure Skater.

"So... she really was alive all the time?! And she was the Blackened for real?!", said Rapunzel, looking perturbed.

In that shared shocked silence, a quiet laugh rang. It took me a while to realize that Elsa was laughing at us, eyes closed, laughing away in such a carefree manner that was disturbing. It only lasted a few seconds, but it had sent shivers down my spine.

"It has been a while since I last saw you, hasn't it?", said Elsa as she regarded us with a cold smile, "It is nice to see that you haven't changed much. It seems you still are the same foolish lot who is incapable of believing what its in front of them."

Her own sigh interrupted her soliloquy.

"Though I suppose I should give you some credit. You did manage to uncover my plot and succeeded in weeding me out. So yes... congratulations, you lot." She curtsied towards us, though I could tell it wasn't sincere. "You have succeeded in besting me and now, it is time for the loser to leave the stage.", she then turned to face the Headmaster with a calm smile. "Now then... Monobear, if you would do the honors... Puhuhu..."

"How...?!"

Jack's voice stopped her from moving. It was a voice charged with restrained anger. I turned to see the Ultimate Mystery and he was quivering, his fists shaking at his sides. His head was cast down-ward, but in once swift movement he raised his gaze and glared at Elsa, small tears gathering on the corner of his eyes. "How?! How can you be so calm?! How can you be so... glad about all this?! You...! You killed your sister! How can you... how could you do that?! How?! Why?!"

That's right... the only thing Jack had a memory of when he awoke in that room was... that he had a sister that he loved dearly. Of course... something like this, something that goes against the very principle of what it means to be siblings... would shake Jack.

Elsa, however, didn't seem perturbed at all. That unnerving smile of hers, calm and collected, never left her lips as she faced the Ultimate Mystery. "Kill? Oh yes... the thing you are all accusing me of...", another chuckle escaped her lips and she closed her eyes with a content smile. "But you see, Overland... I didn't really kill my sister of anyone here... I was merely saving them!"

And as she said those last words, she opened her eyes and what I saw made my heart skip a beat. In her eyes... there was an emptiness that was like no other. Devoid of emotion, of any light. Accompanied by that smile of hers, carefree and wide, it gave her face a deranged expression; one of despair.

Her words made no sense to me... W-what did she mean by saved...?!

"What the fuck... are you talking about?! ", said Flynn as he parroted my thoughts.

Suddenly, Elsa began to laugh, a crazy laugh that escalated in intensity until it was a full blown cackle, completely at odds with the Elsa we knew. She only stopped for breath before staring at us again with that same gaze, her eyes wide. "What? Waaaas I not clear...? I said I saved them all today! Those idiots Tuffnut and

Ruffnut... and my sweet, dear, precious Anna... I saved them all!"

"H-Has this broad lost it...?!", said Snotlout as he backed away a little from the Ultimate Figure Skater.

"I... I don't understand... how is killing people 'saving' them...?", asked Rapunzel, confused and scared as we were. "What is there to save them from...?"

Elsa immediately seized on that, and spun around to face the blonde girl in an erratic way. "I... I saved them... I liberated them from this horrible situation... this horrible, future-less world... and I gave them the salvation of death... of \*\*despair\*\*...!"

And that was when I noticed it. On her wrist were two small dots... So that proved it... and suddenly I understood.

Elsa had been under the effects of the Despair-Syndrome... and she had not been cured. Because she removed her bracelet for the plan. But why would she do that...? She had to have known that removing her bracelet would also cost her the cure... so why?

And why was she... talking about despair just like Monobear...?

I hadn't been the only who had noticed it, apparently, because soon enough Peter brought up the subject.

"So, my suspicions were correct all along. You were indeed under the effects of the Despair-Syndrome."

Everyone looked at Peter and then towards Elsa's wrist. The Ultimate Figure Skater noticed and showed off her marked wrist so that everyone could see. "Thaaaat's right, Mr. Black. It was thanks to this beautiful disease that I was awakened to the truth! The truth of this world that I \*\*had long forgotten... \*\*yes, I am forever grateful for the \*\*Remembering \*\*Disease I got! Because... Because because because... it was thanks to it that I remembered my true calling... to save the one I love the most on this Earth from the horrible hope that is life!"

"What is she even talkin' about?! Did she go nuts or somethin'?!", asked Merida, clearly unnerved. I... I don't really get what she is talking about either... but there is something that caught my attention. With a gulp, I spoke up.

"D-Did... did you say Remembering Disease...?"

Elsa's stare turned hateful once she heard me speak, but the one that answered was Monobear.

"You heard right, Hiccy! Elsy here really lucked out! For you see... she got the Remembering strain!"

"...W-what did she remember?", asked Tooth.

"Yeah, what the hell does this Remembering Disease even do?", followed up Flynn. "Is that why she's spouting nonsense?! Did your stupid illness make her lose her mind?!"

Monobear giggled, and his red eye flashed brightly. This wasn't going to be good. "Hey, settle down there, bucko! All the Remembering Disease did was return Elsy's memories to the way they were before all of this started! If she's acting all weird, it's not because I did something to her\_ or whatever. She's acting like this because she now remembers everything and how she used to be! Nothing more... nothing less!"

...What? Wait... is he saying that...?!

"Are you saying that Elsa... remembers her years in Hope's Peak Academy?!", said Rapunzel, looking shocked.

"But if th-that's the case... then why? W-why is she acting like this...?! Has she really remembered... was she actually like this during Hope's Peak Academy...?!", asked Fishlegs to the silver haired girl.

She chuckled lowly before answering. "Ahh... Hope's Peak Academy... I have to say, the first few years there were such a bore...", and as she trailed off she shot a scathing look at me, brief but noticeable. "...But those last years I spent there? They changed me into who I am today, and I loved it! I've... never felt more alive than when I became a member of **\*\*Ultimate Despair\*\***!"

...! What in the-?!

"Did... did I hear that right?", asked Peter, clearly surprised. "You... you are a member of Ultimate Despair...?"

"So you're the one behind all of this?! You're the mastermind?! Or maybe... you are the traitor?! ", asked Jack, getting visibly more angry with each passing second.

Elsa, however, laughed coolly at the whitette and shook her head. "Really, what a one track mind... I cannot believe you caught me with that stupid line of thinking. No, of course I am not the mastermind or the traitor. I didn't even know I was a member of Ultimate Despair until I got infected, so it was impossible for me to be all of those things.", another chuckle, "Don't you lot remember? Ultimate Despair is an organization. I'm only but one of their many members."

"But... but Ultimate Despair was disbanded a long time ago according to these documents...!", interjected Fishlegs, clearly panicking. "So how-"

"WHO THE FUCK CARES ABOUT THAT?! ", interrupted Snotlout before looking at Elsa. "You! You are a member of the sickos who put us here, right?! Then you must know everything! Why the fuck are we here?! What's the mastermind's plan?! Who is the one behind Monobear?! Answer me, god damn it!"

Elsa closed her eyes before shaking her head. "I don't know."

"Don't l-lie! You are a member of Ultimate Despair! You have to know what the hell is going on here!" stammered Flynn, pointing an accusatory finger at her.

"But I'm not lying.", said Elsa as she stared at the Ultimate Thief with wide eyes. "You are assuming a lot of things about how Ultimate

Despair works! I am not even sure if the mastermind behind this is the same person as the one that leads the organization, and even if it were... I wouldn't know who that is! The leader of Ultimate Despair works in the shadows and their identity isn't known to everyone! Too many enemies to flaunt their identity to all, y'know?"

"As for what is Ultimate Despair's goal in this hideous camp... I don't know either! I told you, I was kidnapped like all of you and got my own memory erased by the mastermind! I have no idea what the hell is going on here, and quite frankly, I don't care." A dreamy smile appeared on Elsa's face as her thoughts wandered somewhere else. "All I cared about was... saving my little sister... nothing more and nothing less."

So... even though we discovered something about the horrid organization behind this... we are still too far away from the truth. We didn't learn anything. I wanted to press her for more details but...

"You keep saying you saved Anna or whatever, but that's just an excuse!", spat out Jack, "There's no way killing someone... that isn't saving at all!"

"But I did save her.", insisted Elsa, her iron mask on her face once more. "I saved her from the horrible reality of this world. Really... all this bilge of surviving together and befriending each other... and wanting to escape to that wretched world behind the walls... What utter nonsense."

Elsa's mask broke into a demented smile. "What good is living in this future-less world? Really, to continue existing in such a putrid, backstabbing world? There doesn't exist anything behind those walls, and there's nothing good inside them either... Thus, the only way to escape from this worthless existence is through the despairful salvation of death."

For the umpteenth time today, I found myself unable to understand. No matter how much Elsa rambled on, I couldn't understand her motivation, her philosophy.

"S-so... you did all of this just because you thought the world sucked so much that you'd rather die?!", tried to summarize Jack, clearly outraged.

"That is right.", answered Elsa, the emptiness on her eyes flickering. "From the moment you are born, you are thrust into this world where you are truly alone, where everyone is against you, where to survive you must hurt and must be hurt by others, betrayed at every turn. How can you say in all honesty that to live is to believe in hope? If that is hope to the world, then I will deny it with all my might! I'd rather chose despair than to continue existing on such a shitty world!"

Something flared up in my chest. "N-no! You're wrong Elsa!", I couldn't let her just say that. Not after what Aster said... not after what he did so that we wouldn't give up on life like this. "T-The world is not like that...! Sure, there is pain and suffering, but we aren't alone! All you have to do is trust each other and-"

But my speech was cut short with a loud snort. I blinked and saw that Elsa was trying to contain her laughter. But it wasn't an amused laugh at all, it was one with scorn. Calming herself down, the Ultimate Figure Skater gave me a "really?" look, a mocking smile playing on her lips. "Listen, Mr. Haddo- no, you know what? You're not even worthy of being addressed like that, \_Hiccup\_. Don't try to get all holier-than-thou with me, squirt. It's reaaaaaally unbecoming! Especially since all that happened... you were an instigator, a moving force behind the events that transpired tonight!"

With each passing second, Elsa's demeanor was changing from the one we knew to one more unhinged. Was this... how she really was? Had she always hated me this much? I knew I wasn't her favorite but... to accuse me of being responsible for this?

"W-what are you talking... a-about?", I hated that my voice was wavering, but I wasn't sure how to react.

"All I'm saying, \_Hiccup\_, is that you're just another person in this world that hurts other people while complaining that everything on their life sucks! Oh, how much you whined about how your Dad was so worried about your well being, or how weird it was to have living parents! How much you complained about the nightmare that it was to have a family! And how much you played the victim when all you did was hurt others, hurt my sister."

Elsa's smile disappeared. "Of all the people in the world, I think the one I truly despise the most is you. Your entire existence makes me sick and it's honestly a shame that I didn't kill you tonight."

It was as if I had hit with a mace. I had never felt such hatred from someone. I was... I was shocked and rendered mute by such animosity. Sweat started to form in my brow and hands and I had to blink a few times just to make sure I was still here and what I was hearing was real. And it definitely was, that person standing in front of me was definitely glaring at me and wishing me to disappear from this Earth in the most painful way possible. But... Why?!

"W-Why...?! What are you talking a-about?! ", was she referring about the memories she had recovered, was she talking about the years we had lost in Hope's Peak Academy?, "Hurt others...?! Hurt Anna?! Are you-?", Was she talking about...?

"Hmph. It wasn't enough to hurt her once, but twice? \_Hiccup\_, you are truly a horrible person. And then you have the gall of acting like a victim when the one that was suffering was Anna? If you hadn't been so careless, so tactless... maybe she would still be alive. And the Twins too. But you never thought of that, didn't you? All you cared about was making out with that faker over there.", said Elsa, no mercy in her accusations.

I felt my chest constrict. "N-no, you are wrong, I-I... I didn't mean to-! H-How is this \_my\_ fault?! W-what was I supposed to do-? This is... this is not my fault! You did all of this! I-it's not my-"

"It is your fault, \_Hiccup\_. \_It's what you do, what you really are. You are always the one who messes everything up, aren't you? The one who can never do anything right! The Useless, you said.", continued



Elsa, pushing the knife in deeper.

Voices, whispers from suppressed moments and memories from the villagers of Berk surfaced in my mind and seized me up in a swirl of emotions that threatened to choke me. I was... I wanted to refute what she was saying, to deny it with all my might but...

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Ugh, that's the fifth house on fire this week thanks to Hiccup the Useless and his weird inventions!"<em>

\_"Isn't that the weird kid that stays all day in his room making useless machines and talking to dragons?"\_

\_"Why hasn't Stoick banished that runt? He really doesn't do anything for the village at all\_"

\* \* \*

><p>But... But Elsa was right... Everything was always my fault... everything...!<p>

Was... was this my fault too? Yeah... Yeah this was my fault... it had to be... it was my fault that so many people died... huh...

"LEAVE HIM THE FUCK ALONE!"

\* \* \*

><p>I couldn't take anymore. I had let this... this bitch hurl abuse at Hic for no reason for too long about things that weren't true and that he wasn't responsible for and I'd had it. Who did she think she was, trying to place the blame on Hic?!<p>

"Why are you trying to pin this whole thing on Hic?! He's not the one who planned this whole murder out! He's not the one who manipulated two sick people into murdering someone and then killed those two people off! He's not the bastard that did all this just to escape! It was you, all of this was your fault!"

Elsa was caught offguard by my outburst, but then laughed waaay too cheery for my liking. With her hand under her chin, she steadied herself and then stared coldly at me. I gladly returned it with a glare of my own. "Mhmmm... yes, you are correct "Overland"... I was just messing with him one last time... but indeed, all of this was my doing and I'm solely to blame... but! You are wrong on one thing! My intention was never to escape!"

"What... then... then why did you do all of this?!", asked Tooth, speaking up all of a sudden, as if she had awoken from a daze.

"Like I said, there's nothing outside for me to want to escape so badly... all I cared about was giving salvation to Anna...", explained Elsa with a sick grin. "Honestly, the outcome of the trial didn't really matter to me! Whether you all died or I died... it was inconsequential. In fact... That's the reason I killed the Twins too! All I cared about was Anna and no one else. If it hadn't been my Monobear's rule, I would probably have killed more of you off." And

as she said that, she gave Hic a brief look, and in that moment I wanted to smash her head in myself. "But alas... in the end, it seems the outcome I desired the least happened... but it's not so bad... After all, I get to experience the despair of death! The biggest privilege of of all... a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity... Puhuhuhu... I can't wait!"

I couldn't wait either. I... I had enough of her. I didn't like her before that much but I didn't think she was bad, but now? I was tired of her. I couldn't understand her and her twisted ideology and I was tired of how little she valued everyone else to the point that she killed two innocent people just because they were vulnerable. I... I just wanted this to end.

"So... that's it? That's your excuse...?", began Punzie, her shoulders trembling, "You... you did all of this without remorse? Without regrets? You murdered two of our friends just because they were useful to you and you killed off your own sister... and you aren't even sad about it?", a single tear rolled down her cheek, "They... we were all friends! How could you just do this... without even caring?! What about all the moments we shared?! Was that nothing to you?! I don't understand...!"

Elsa's answer was... nothing. She decidedly ignored Punzie's plea, that smile of hers not even moving an inch. She didn't even open her eyes, acting as if she was all alone in this courtroom.

"You don't understand because people are incapable of understanding each other to begin with!", interjected Monobear, his dark side facing us with one paw raised. "Honestly, humans are so silly! You claim you understand each other but you just go through life pretending that you do! That's why you're unable to understand Elsy's motivation! I don't have that problem, though, because I'm a bear!"

A familiar mechanical noise stirred from under the floor and that red button rose up in front of Monobear, gavel in hand and ready to deliver judgement. "Aaaaanywaaaays... we could stay all day here and debate human nature, but I'm a busy bear so let's get this show on the road! Elsy's guilt is obvious by now so... drum roll please!"

Absolutely no did as Monobear said, some of us not even looking at the Blackened who was smiling despite her imminent death. No matter how rotten she had turned out to be... this was still going to be a horrible experience. Seeing someone die... is never easy, no matter how much you hate them...

"Now then! I've prepared a very special punishment for the Ultimate Figure Skater turned Ultimate Despair, Elsa of Arendelle!", yelled out Monobear as he spun the gavel on his hand skillfully.

A sigh made me look at the silver-haired girl. Elsa... was crying. And speaking to herself. Through closed eyes, a melancholic tone of voice floated around the courtroom, her final words clear. "Ahh... at last it ends... I've been so tired... of existing... of being alone for so long...far too long. I'm sorry for leaving your side however briefly, dear sister... but I'll be by your side soon enough. I hope you will forgive me as I die with the hope of seeing you again in my heart..."

"Leeeeeet's give it everything we got! It's PUNIIIIIIIIISHMENT TIME!"

And with that last shrill shout, Monobear pressed the button. 8-bit music and a fanfare playing as another metallic claw descended from a hatch on the ceiling, taking away the latest victim of Monobear's game, that calm smile of hers never disappearing.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Punishment: How to Let Go by Elsa Arendelle<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>The giant TV screen Monobear had prepared for us so we could see the Blackened's punishment descended from the ceiling and turned on, showing us a new landscape quite unlike the other ones we had seen.<p>

A wintry forest was the setting, but the camera was giving us an overview of a clearing where a frozen over lake could be seen. A serene snowfall could be seen, constant but not enough to drown everything in snow, the pine trees showing off a coating of the icy substance already, the snow glistening under the moonlight. It would be a beautiful scene... if only someone wasn't going to die here soon. That someone... Elsa, was standing in the middle of the lake, wearing ice skates and showing off a calm demeanor, as if ready to perform.

All of a sudden, she struck a pose, elegant, and one that I had seen on one of the books that talked about skating in the library. But there was something... off. A closer look revealed that there was something stuck to her limbs... it looked like string. As if the camera had read my mind, the scene shifted from point of view to a point high above Elsa. In the sky was Monobear, standing on a weird, floating contraption, holding on his paws a pair of paddle controls similar to those used to move marionettes.

As soon as I processed what was going, a whistle sounded off and multiple roars could be heard in the horizon. The camera panned out once again and this time focused on the forest, where silhouettes could be seen moving towards the clearing at alarming speed. It didn't take long for the silhouettes to reveal themselves as they ran towards Elsa with intent to kill.

They... they were dragons, no doubt about it. Standing on two power legs, covered in green scales and possessing red eyes and a crest on their head, along with a long tail equipped with a stinger... These were Speedstingers, the ones Hic had told me about once when we first met. These dragons were pack hunters and they used their speed, numbers and paralyzing stinger to hunt and overcome prey.

A ball of lead started to form on my stomach as I saw the alpha Speedstinger, signaled by the red crest and stripes, order the pack of ten dragons to move out and strike. Cold sweat ran down my face as the dragons advanced on the Ultimate Figure Skater...!

She avoided the first strike, but something was wrong with her movements. It was as if she was moving involuntarily. To prove my

suspensions, the camera panned up towards Monobear, who was frantically moving the paddle controls to direct Elsa's dodges. I had to give it to her grudgingly, even though she was being controlled against her will... her movements were breath taking.

However, that beauty, that entrancement... didn't last long. No matter how much Monobear tried to outfox the Speedstingers, their superior numbers were too much. One of them managed to sting Elsa on her right arm and that part went limp, hanging uselessly and slowing down the involuntary movements. Soon after came another sting, this time to her leg and another and another until Elsa was entirely paralyzed, her body being dragged around the icy surface of the lake before... before the whole pack of Speedstingers jumped her, surrounding her entirely.

The last we saw of her was the gruesome spectacle of her death as she was consumed by the dragons quickly and efficiently, the crushing of bones and ripping of limbs and skin haunting us as the lake's frozen over surface was painted crimson. Up above, Monobear simply dropped the paddle controls with a shrug, and with that, the screen shut off, the bloody event seared into our minds.

\* \* \*

><p>And with that, it was over.<p>

The Class Trial... the THIRD Class Trial... was over. And yet, though we were left feeling horrified like in previous Class Trials... there was something different hanging in the air. Quite unlike Aster's and Astrid's Trials', which left us with a sense of sadness and pain... no, the thing that was different in the ambiance was...

Malice.

Elsa's pure, unadulterated malice was all she left behind. Aster and Astrid urged us towards hope, but Elsa kept hating us until the very end, leaving behind a trace of malice that wasn't easy to ignore or dismiss. With the others, we could at least have the consolation that we could use this to move forward, somehow. But with Elsa...? All we got was cold scorn and an empty feeling. Hic was looking incredibly down as well, shaking a little as he embraced himself, his face obscured by his bangs of messy brown hair. I wanted to go to his side and reassure him that all the stupid shit Elsa said about him was wrong, when Monobear's cackling stopped me.

"AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA MAN THAT WAS SO EXTREEEEEEEEEEE!", said the Headmaster as he spun on the tip of his feet. "Did you get a good load of all that?! Man, it felt so great to have that crazy bimbo under my control! AND YOUR FACES! HAH! TOTALLY WORTH THE PRODUCTION COST!", Monobear then calmed down and crossed his arms, pondering something. "But this is not enough... yes, I can still up the ante! I won't stop until you bastards can't even hope for despair! You haven't even seen the worst I can do! Puhuhuhuhuhuhuhuhu...!"

"S-So you're really going to keep this up...?", asked Flynn, his face gaunt and tired, his voice lacking any of its usual force.

"I-I don't want to do this anymore!", complained Fishlegs, close to

breaking down.

"Me neither! I'd rather just die right now! Just fucking kill me!", said Snotlout with an angry expression clouded by tears on the corners of his eyes.

Monobear brought a paw to his chin, rubbing it thoughtfully, "Hmm... Y'know... that's not a bad idea!", at that Snotlout flinched and stepped back, but Monobear simply laughed at him. "But where would the fun be in that? It would be too easy and besides, it's not like I care about the outcome of these trials and how many people die! I really am tired of saying this, but all I care about is \*\*covering you all with irrevocable despair with nary a chance for hope to blossom in your hearts\*\*!"

...What does that mean? He doesn't care... about who dies? But then, why isn't he killing us all? Why even put that rule in the first place if he doesn't care about victims at all?

"In any case", said Monobear as he turned his back on us. "I really hope you guys got the futility of your situation through that thick skull! There is no escape from here, there is no use in looking for an alternate way. No room for comrades, no reason to fight back or resist! All you must do to escape is succumb to your primal instincts and kill kill kill until you can't even understand the true meaning of the word! Puhuhu!"

"Y-You're wrong..."

At that trembling voice, Monobear stopped moving and talking. Turning his head slightly so only his black side and red eye were showing, the Headmaster looked for the source of the objection. I didn't have to look; I knew that voice... Hic's voice was unmistakable.

The Ultimate Lucky Student's eyes were red as he stared defiantly at the Headmaster, a trickle of snot freezing slightly as it ran down his face. Hic was standing firmly despite all of this, and he was facing the plush toy head on. "Y-You're wrong. There is a reason to fight back and resist! There is room for comrades! All of this... All of this happened because we didn't understand Elsa! Because we weren't friends! If she hadn't felt so alone... she wouldn't have fallen into despair!"

Hic cleaned the snot on his face with his sleeve. "So... we aren't going to stop... trying to resist you! All we have to do to win against you is trust each other! If we manage to erase every trace of doubt in our hearts, you have no power against us! Which is why... we'll never stop resisting you... no matter what you throw at us!"

Everyone stood there wide-eyed, all of them impressed by the brashness that Hic had shown. Slowly, those expressions full of despair began to give away to more positive ones, as they processed the truth behind Hic's words. I couldn't help but to feel proud that Hic... that my boyfriend of all people had stood up to the Headmaster. I made my way to his side and took my place, holding his hand for support. I had the vague feeling that everyone else was starting to stir and stand behind us, but all I could focus was on Hic's face, that adorable sun-kissed skin of his turning red at the sudden contact, his eyes wide with surprise. But he soon calmed down,

understanding my actions, a wide smile, bright and cheery illuminating his gloomy face.

Hic had been right. He was absolutely right. In this horrible reality we were forced to face, giving up to despair and distrusting each other was the worst thing we could do. It was going to be hard, but we had to give it our all and stand strong against Monobear's threats. We had to trust each other... completely. Like me and Hic.

Monobear didn't even move as he took a look at us, our unified front. I was beginning to hope that the Headmaster was intimidated into silence but soon enough he spun quickly to face us, his face bright red with anger, his white fist flailing around in a fit of rage.

"Uuuuugh! How do you even say all that stuff without barfing?! Seriously, that's gotta be the most naive and stupid pep talk I've ever heard! You think that hope is enough to crush me? To deter me? Weak! Weakweakweakweakweak stuff for babies that poop their pants! That didn't even reduce a single Hit Point! Barely a scratch!"

The Headmaster was huffing as he finished his rant, but he took a deep breath before continuing his rambling. "You're all soooo stupid! Time after time you keep falling into this "we trust each other completely and we won't kill anymore" crap, and time after time you keep getting betrayed by someone! Seriously, doesn't it get old to be so naive? Saying stupid stuff like, "we trust each other completely"... when you guys don't even know each other fully? It's the peak of stupidity!"

Monobear jabbed a finger at us, not stopping. "Didn't you learn your lesson yet? Humans can't understand each other! No matter how much you believe that, you'll never truly know a person fully! And to trust a person you don't even know... that's why you guys keep getting betrayed! I mean...", Monobear's eye flashed red. "You guys were swayed by Hiccy's discourse, and you chose to trust him blindly, but... did it ever cross your mind that Hiccy could be the next one who betrays you? After all..."

Monobear's grin grew wide. "How can you claim to find Hiccy trustworthy... when he's hiding vital info from you all?"

At that, Hic flinched.

But why? T... there's no way Monobear is telling the truth... right?

I took a look at Hic's face and what I saw made my heart shake a little and made my smile drop. He was looking nervous, his eyes moving from here and there.

"Errr... Hiccup... what is Monobear talking about?", asked Punzie, but before the Ultimate Lucky Student could answer, Monobear spoke up.

"Remember that time when Hiccy participated in the Final Dead Room, and because of that, he got info that pointed towards the Blackened in North's Trial?", asked Monobear, a white paw behind his head. "Well, that's not all Hiccy got from that adventure! He got a little

bonus he still refuses to share with you!"

"Is that true, Hiccup?", asked Tooth, her gaze worried as she scanned the little Viking's face for a tell, as if she were a mother trying to catch a kid on a lie.

"What kind of info is this?", asked Peter, his gaze focused on Monobear.

"Oh... nothing big, really... just \*\*info from the outside world\*\*!", announced the Headmaster joyfully.

My heart skipped a beat. You could hear a pin drop in the stunned silence of the courtroom, a silence only broken by Monobear's boisterous voice.

"Now... why would you think he would that? I mean... you are all supposed to be friends who trust each other and that want out, so why would he hide such info from you?", asked the Headmaster in a sing song voice.

"Oi, Haddock!", shouted Snotlout, pushing me and Hic away as he seized the thin boy by the arms. "Is that bastard telling the truth?! Then out with it! What did you find out?!"

"And why haven't you told us all?", asked Flynn, suspicion clear on his face.

Hic looked frantically between the crowd that was pinning him with stares, before stammering out an explanation. "I-I wasn't trying to hide it! Honest! It's just... a lot of stuff happened and I never had the time to tell you so-!"

"BZZZT! Wrong! That's not it at all!", said Monobear as he wagged his finger disapprovingly. "Hiccy didn't reveal those secrets, that info he found on, \*\*because I told him not to!\*\*"

...

...What...?

Did he really say... no, I must have heard wrong...

As I gazed around the courtroom, everyone had stopped moving. The looks on their faces... made me realize they had also heard the Headmaster's confession.

This... this has to be a lie, right...?

"Oi... Monobear... are you sayin'?", began Mer, but the Headmaster interrupted her, an innocent look on his face.

"Hmm? Yes, you heard that right! Hiccy didn't divulge that information to you because I ordered him not to. Becaaaaause... he's working with me! He's the traitor working behind your backs!"

Instantly, the mood turned tense. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This... this is a joke, right? It has to be a joke! There's

no way... there's no way this is true.

"W-what?! NO! I'm...", shouts the Ultimate Lucky Student as he processes what Monobear is saying, "I'm not the traitor! R-really! Come on guys... don't believe him just like that! He is lying!"

That snapped me out of my daze. That panicked expression, the shaking voice as he tried his best to explain himself and as he started to back away from the accusatory glances... it made me speak up.

"He's right guys! Come on, how can we trust Monobear's words just like that? We all know better by now! Monobear is just a lying sack of fleas."

"How rude!", interjected Monobear, "I'm just trying to help you guys and weed out the traitor... you don't need to be so mean! I mean... I even brought the info Hiccy dutifully hid from you..."

At that, everyone snapped up. Snot threw Hic aside and walked towards the Headmaster, who was holding out a file. The Ultimate Heavy Lifter seized it in one hand and feverishly started to read it, his eyes not missing a single line.

"What the... riots? Monobear robots...? \_Gas masks...?!\_... What the fuck is this shit?!", said the burly teen as he scrunched up the edges of the file, which turned out to be a newspaper article. Suddenly, Snotlout opened his eyes fully, shock and disbelief clear in his face. "What the hell... "List of Victims...?"... What the fuck is going on here...?!"

At that, everyone surrounded Snotlout, trying to get a peek of the file. I stood behind and helped Hic up, but he didn't even notice me. His eyes were focused on the rest of us, fear clear on those forest greens which now were a duller shade.

"That's the state of the outside world you so want to return to!", said Monobear jovially, "Hiccy was supposed to keep this info secret until the very end, and he was to reveal it to you to crush your hope! But he tried to go against me, so I retaliated and outed him to you all! That's the punishment you get for being a bad lackey, Hiccy! Puhuhuhuhu!"

No matter what Hiccup said, it didn't matter anymore. The seed of doubt in everyone's hearts had already sprouted; it could be seen in the eyes of the others as they stared at Hic with distrust after they finished reading the file Monobear had brought. And... the Ultimate Lucky Student seemed to realize that. All he could do was stare at the rest of the students, unable to utter words that would fall on deaf ears.

I wanted to take Hic away from this place. Away from all the judging glances. But my train of thought was interrupted when Tooth called my name.

"Jack... Jack... there is something here... that is related to you..."

Her voice was distant, but I heard everything and I hated how my curiosity was piqued. I turned around to give Hic a reassuring smile, but I might as well not exist to him right now. So, with a hard gulp,



I walked over to where everyone was huddled and took a look at the file.

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><p><strong>"The Tragedy" Claims Even More Victims. Missing People's Whereabouts Still Unknown.<strong>

\_Authorities are still on the lookout of the missing students and civilians on the outbreak of The Tragedy. Though the army is on full-alert and fully deployed in order to suppress the riots and to find any of the reported missing people, it is highly suspected that these missing people have joined the ever-growing list of victims.\_

\_Today's victims, as reported by Hope's Peak Academy, are as follows:\_

- Spitelout Jorgenson
- Finn Hofferson
- Tadashi Hamada
- Manuel I. Moony
- Fergus DunBronch
- Stoick Haddock
- Jack Overland
- Gobber the Belch (sic)
- Jamie Benett
- Emma Overland

\_Among the many missing people, the following were reported:\_

- Valka Haddock
- Hiro Hamada
- Elinor DunBronch
- Jackson Overland

\_It is advised to the general population to not wander the streets alone. Gas masks should always be worn on excursions though going outside the shelters is not advised as your safety is not guaranteed. As there is no known weapon better suited to combat the Monobear riot-robots, authorities suggest that no civilians should confront the robots. These machines are programmed to kill on sight.\_

\_Hope's Peak Academy and the Future Foundation haven't given any estimates on how long these riots will continue, but have promised that they will deal with the Monobears soon enough.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Time seemed to stop as I read every line, every paragraph and letter. What I was reading... was so unbelievable... so ridiculous... it seemed to come out from one of those ridiculous comic books I had found in the library. And yet, in the midst of the unbelievable description of riots, Monobear bots and shelters, something jumped out to me that made me start to believe. And at the same time... it filled me with confusion.<p>

According to this article... Emma was dead.

My dear little sister... the one who had believed in me despite her teasing... the one that trusted me enough to protect her, who looked up to me... even though she was every bit as brilliant and funny as me, and perhaps even more.

She... she was dead. And I couldn't do anything to deny that possibility. That reality. And worse of all, I had... I had forgotten this. I didn't even know...! Until now...! That she... that she was dead...!

The images from that DVD that Monobear gave us rose to my brain and I started to breathe heavily. She was... she was dead... she had died... along with me... and my whole family.

I am all alone... I am nothing, a blank slate with no past or future... and now, I have nothing. Absolutely nothing left...! Nothing to look forward to! There is no... no home for me anymore!

And \_he\_... \_Hic\_ \_knew all along. And he didn't tell me...!

Anger flared up in my chest as I advanced on the dazed Ultimate Lucky Student.

\* \* \*

><p>I couldn't even start to process what was going on. Somehow... everything... everyone had been turned against me. Monobear's accusations had made all of them doubt me, and... and there was nothing I could do. I couldn't prove... that Monobear was lying, I couldn't refute his claims.<p>

All I could do was stare without really looking, replay every event on my mind, and view how everything had gone to hell.

All of a sudden, someone seized me by the arms once again, this time strong enough to make me wince. I blinked and focused my view and all of a sudden I was looking at a furious Jack.

That made my heart accelerate. I tried to move away but he was holding onto my arms strongly... that was sure to leave a bruise. I... I was afraid, I realized. Why...? Why was Jack mad at me...!?

"Hiccup, why didn't you tell me?!"

I winced as Jack shook me by the arms, demanding answers. "Why didn't you tell me that Emma was dead?! You... you knew how important she is to me... and yet... you didn't tell me!"

My throat clenched up as I saw Jack's eyes water. Through an enormous effort, I found my voice and I tried to explain myself. "I-I'm sorry Jack, honestly! I-I didn't mean to hide this! I really wanted to tell you... I wanted to tell you all about this but...!"

"But you couldn't... because those were your orders... right?"

Jack's question... no... accusation, stopped me dead on my tracks. All I could do was stare incredulously at the whitette; look at those blue eyes of his in hope of finding trust and understanding. All I found was two cold sapphires, harsh and unforgiving and full of doubt.

"You... You really think I'm...?", I couldn't believe this. It felt like I was being stabbed in the chest mercilessly.

"That's why you didn't tell me... I see now.", Jack let go of me and backed away, his eyes judging me harshly. "I thought... I really believed that you were trustworthy... that you would never betray me! But I was wrong... you were deceiving me since the beginning, weren't you?! "

No... no, this-

"Was everything a lie, Hiccup?! Was everything an inside work, all you did?! Was our relationship part of the plan?! Huh?!"

Every accusation felt like death delivered straight to me. "No! Jack, honestly! I'm telling you! Believe me, I'm not the traitor! I just- No... I do love you! And I do trust you, so please-!"

"But you didn't trust me enough to tell me...", he interrupted, his glare turning even harsher, "I should have known... Monobear was right... I shouldn't have trusted someone who I don't even know fully."

That... made something inside of me snap. Why?! Why wouldn't he let me explain myself?! Why was he so ready to cast me aside?!

Against my better judgement, I began to speak, anger fueling every word I spoke. "How can you even say that to me?! You don't think I'm trustworthy?!"

No, Haddock, stop. Before you say something you regret...!

"How can you claim I'm not trustworthy Jack?! Look at you! You don't even know who you are!"

I really want to stop but...!

"It's funny how you chose to ignore on purpose what that newspaper said about you. That you are dead! And yet, you are here, alive! How is that even not the slightest suspicious to you?! You say I can't be trusted because you don't know the real me, but you don't even know who you are to begin with!"

Someone... someone shut me up.

"If Monobear was right about something... it was the fact that I shouldn't have trusted a nobody like you! I shouldn't have fallen for someone like you!"

Jack looked as if he had been struck and the instant my words left my mouth, I regretted everything. But I couldn't help it... I had said things I didn't want to say but that I felt. And now the damage was done. The whitette lowered his gaze, not staring at me, and then he mumbled something to me.

"Then maybe we shouldn't be together. Can't very well be together if we don't trust each other, huh?"

I hated my pride on that instant, and how it refused me the ability to back down from an argument. I knew I was right. I wasn't the traitor. And I wasn't going to let anyone think that or step all over me.

I really hated myself right there as I spoke. I too lowered my gaze, not wanting to see the reaction that my words would cause.

"Maybe we shouldn't."

The silence that followed my answer was soul crushing. The courtroom felt charged with an immense pressure that I couldn't stand. I had said something I couldn't take back now. And I couldn't stand this anymore.

Without thinking, I bailed out from the courtroom, not looking back. I didn't want to see anything anymore. I felt numb as I rode the elevator back to the Camp, the recent events playing over and over in my head, the mistakes and things I said haunting me all the way back to my cottage.

I didn't even notice how I got back to my room. I didn't even notice that I was lying on my bed.

All I could focus on was... how horrible everything was.

Everything... I had lost everything. I had lost my friends. I had lost my family and my home. I had lost my best friend. And now... I had lost Jack.

And everything... everything was my fault. Somehow, I had lost everything that mattered to me, in the blink of an eye.

And I hadn't noticed. Just like how I didn't notice when I fell asleep. All I could focus on was the pain in my chest that wouldn't leave no matter how much I sobbed and cried and begged for everything to stop leaving me.

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><p>The ride back to the Camp was awkward and silent. The elevator was charged with the stench of doubt and distrust as everyone stood far away from each other, not even bothering to look at me or the others.<p>

That was fine with me. I wanted to be alone now. I didn't want anyone

to talk to me.

Because if they did... I was afraid I was going to break down.

I lost everything today. I found out that I had lost my sister, and now I didn't even know who I was. No identity, no home. All of these things had been taken from me.

But I had lost something else today, and I couldn't blame this on anyone else but me. I had been so angry, so confused and hurt and frustrated with everything that surrounded me that I had lashed out against someone I held dear.

I couldn't stop the hurricane of emotions that swirled inside me as I tore apart the only meaningful link I had formed here. There was no doubt... that Hic-, that Hiccup really trusted me no matter what, and yet something inside me snapped on that moment and I lashed out.

I hated myself so much right now. How could I... How could I have said those things?

And now... and now I'm truly alone in this place.

My frustration and confusion ate me up as I reached my dorm until I couldn't hold it up anymore. It was as if a dam had burst, and I couldn't stop it. Sobs shook me and rocked me as I leaned on the wall of my room and slid slowly to the floor, curling up in an effort to stop myself from rocking.

But no matter how much I cried, how much I wailed and shouted the name of my sister and Hic... no matter how much I asked for forgiveness to no one that could hear me... it did nothing to alleviate my pain.

All I could do was exhaust myself with grief, and I welcomed sleep as one last whine left my lips, giving into the comfort of darkness.

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><p><strong>null \_POV;<strong>

From the darkness of the room littered with monitors, Monobear observed the fruit of his works with gleeful abandon. As he checked on the students who were sleeping, trying to sleep or that lay awake, the Headmaster couldn't help but to hoot with reckless abandon, spinning his own chair with delight. He had done it, he had outdone himself this time.

"The plan is back on track and it's all going so well!", said Monobear, though that person didn't know if the Headmaster was talking to him or not, "And all it took was one crazy bimbo and one dark little lie! Man, talk about a lucky break!"

That person is intrigued... what did Monobear mean by "lucky break?". That person already knew that Monobear had lied about the traitor's identity. After all, that person was most definitely not Hiccup Horrendous Haddock.

"Well, I'm just saying...", began Monobear as he spun his chair around to get a better look at that person, "It was just my luck that

the motive this time around worked in my favor! I mean, that the former Ultimate Despair member ended up getting the Remembering Disease, of all the strains I had prepared? Yep yep, I'm definitely beary lucky! But thanks to Elsy's condition, I was able to give those suckers a full dosage of despair!"

Monobear turned his back on that person and stared intently at the monitors that showed Hiccup and Jackson Overland. A sick grin played on the plush's snout. "The plan is entering the final stages. All I need to do is give these bastards one final push... one little shove... and I'll have them trapped all in an inescapable sand trap of despair!"

That person noticed the monitor that Monobear was looking at and questioned the Headmaster. Why had he lied about the traitor's identity? Monobear didn't need to put Haddock on the spot like that; all he had to do was reveal the new info to all of them and the effect would have been the same. So why...?

Monobear turned his chair around and faced that person with a tilted head. "Oh my... did you finally notice?"

At that, that person nodded slowly. That person had been getting this weird suspicion ever since he started monitoring everyone... somehow, the motives set by the Headmaster seemed to revolve around one person... and now that Monobear had pretty much admitted to it right now, that person could only wonder out loud...

Why... was the Headmaster targeting Hiccup Horrendous Haddock...?

Monobear pondered the question for a quiet moment before giggling. "Puhuhuhu! Looks like the bear's out of the bag! You're really sharp!"

The bear returned his gaze to the monitor that was showing off the Ultimate Lucky Student. "I don't really have to tell you \_WHY\_ I am targeting Hiccy, but let me correct you on something; you are kind of wrong! Like I said since the very beginning, all I care about is filling the world with despair! So when I unleash my motives on these flaky \*\*Symbols of Hope, \*\*I do it with everyone in mind, even you!"

That person waited for Monobear to continue, and so the Headmaster did, "But as for why it seems like I'm targeting Hiccy more than the others... I guess I can say this!", with that dramatic pause, the Headmaster turned his chair and faced that person with that flashing red eye of his, "In order to bring despair to all... I guess you could say I'm going to use Hiccy to achieve that goal! Or something like that! Puhuhuhuhuhuhuhu!"

As that person heard the cryptic message of the Headmaster, that person couldn't help but to express his dissatisfaction with the bear's goals. That person was very against the idea of using Hiccup or anyone else to spread despair. That person's objections, however, were interrupted by a loud explosion to their right that knocked them to their feet. From behind the Headmaster came a blast of purple fire that nearly obliterated that person.

A smell of something burning assaulted that person's nostrils, the

sound of the blast, similar to lightning, still ringing on that person's ears. As he looked at the Headmaster and the direction from where the blast came from, he saw something slither from under the desk of the monitors, their shape obscured in the darkness, their identity hard to discern. All he could make out was... a pair of green acidic eyes with slit-like pupils staring at him.

Monobear cleared his throat and that person stared at the Headmaster, who looked rather smug. "Heeeey... you aren't thinking of going against my orders, right? If you try to rebel, you know what is waiting for you... and for them. So you better learn your place!"

There was nothing that person could do but to comply. Dying on a place like this would be a waste. Sensing the obedience of that person, Monobear smiled and the presence behind him left the room quietly. The Headmaster cleared his throat before speaking to that person. "In any case, keep observing those guys with a watchful eye! And keep looking for Sanderson's Dairy! We can't let that book fall on the hands of these bastards! I need it to finish up the Despair Restoration Plan too! We're keeping a good pace, but don't dilly-dally!"

With that, that person was dismissed. Much to that person's distaste, he bowed to the Headmaster and left.

As soon as he was alone, Monobear looked at the screen that was monitoring the Meeting Spot, his eyes trained on the countdown.

Yep... everything was going smoothly. Right now, life was good for the Headmaster. And things would only escalate from here on.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>DAYS LEFT: 13<strong>

\*\*STUDENTS STILL ALIVE: 9\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>CHAPTER 3 - DESPAIR-SYNDROME - END<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And that's the end of this arc! Man, we are past the middle point of this story and I can't wait for you guys to see the rest of it! Big things are coming!<strong>

\*\*Speaking of which, I have kind of an announcement to make. As of this chapter, I think I'm going to play around with the structure of the story. One of the things I'm doing away with is Free Time Events. I think I'm going to play with points of view too.\*\*

\*\*In any case, I hope you enjoyed this chapter! It was soul crushing to write it once, and it was soul crushing to write it twice, so I really hope it does the same to your heart! As usual, review and commentate if you so wish!\*\*

\*\*See you all in the next arc!\*\*

## 35. 4 - Chapter 4 - Log A

**Chapter 4 - Desire for Execution**

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Suuup guys! It's been a while hasn't it? Yeah, I left you hanging long enough, so here's another chapter. <strong>

**This is a rather short one, especially when you compare it to the previous one! Think of it as a transition chapter, but not just any ol' transition chapter! From this point forward, as we near the climax of the story, I'm going to change up the structure of the story.**

**I was afraid of stagnation and formulaic structure and thus I decided to do some changes that will be for the best and that will give me more liberties than the previous structure allowed. Which is why I did away with the Free Time mechanic. Hopefully you will notice the differences.**

**I'm still keeping the first person point of view unless stated otherwise :b**

**Long foreword done. Enjoy!**

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Log A: "White"<strong>

**Rapunzel's POV**

A day had passed since the conclusion of the third Class Trial, and honestly? Things were looking bad. Everybody was on edge or depressed and sad, and it permeated the entire camp grounds. We stood divided among ourselves thanks to Monobear's revelations and that's why I found myself eating all alone on the Restaurant. It was very lonely... I had grown used to eating with all of my friends, but now... everyone was doing their own thing.

Hiccup had it worse than everyone, though. For all the loneliness I felt, I was sure the Ultimate Lucky Student had it worse. Everyone had turned against him. Even I... yeah, I was pretty angry and confused when Monobear pulled those files on him, and I didn't know what to think, but now that I had calmed down... I regretted my actions. And I wanted to apologize.

But Hiccup was nowhere to be seen. It wasn't like anybody else was looking for him; they still distrusted him as far as I know (which isn't much, since I haven't talked to anyone ever since that day), but I had walked around the Camp to clear my mind and nothing! No sign of auburn hair, nor freckles.

Jack... was around, but he was worse for wear. He looked tired and demotivated, no longer even bothering to fake a smile. He also was kind of jumpy, looking from here and there as if he was expecting something or someone to pop up, his eyes full of wariness and hesitation. I... had an idea of who he was expecting, but I wonder...



if he'll have the guts to face him after that fight they had?

A weary sigh escaped my lips as I toyed with my sunny-side eggs, not really feeling sunny or better. I was so entranced and focused on my dilemmas that I didn't notice Merida had entered the restaurant until she proceeded to sit next to me. I was startled, to say the least, when a sigh not coming from me broke the silence!

I eyed the forlorn and defeated redhead next to me curiously. This was an odd sight- I hadn't expected anyone to come see me, and this was an unusual kind of mood for Merida. A tense silence stretched over as I debated with myself if I should break the silence or not... I was kind of curious why Merida had decided to talk to me, after all! So, with a resolve I didn't know I had in me, I put on my best smile and greeted her.

"Hi, Merida! How's it going?"

Stupid! Stupidstupidstupid! That was waaay too cheery for the situation at hand! Merida thinks so too, given her "are you OK" face she's giving me. Her scowl returns as she shrugs and answers in a monotone tone of voice.

"Nothin' much. Really, I'm just so bloody tired of it all..."

She pauses as she slumps over the table, her red mane obscuring her face as she speaks through it, muffled voice of annoyance.

"This sucks... everythin' is such a mess and I just wish everyone made up or whatever."

I turn back to my plate and stab one of the eggs, the yolk bursting over and spreading all around the plate.

"Yeah, I get you... It's like, there's this dreary cloud all over the camp and everyone is on edge and nothing is getting done and Monobear is out there plotting something for more deaths and we don't know anything AN-"

"Whoa! Whoa! Slow down, girl!", All the apprehension I had stored inside me threatened to leak out once I began to speak, and I hadn't noticed until Merida decided to stop my ramblings. With an uneasy laugh after I managed to catch my breath, the Ultimate Archer joked, "Seems like Ms. Sunshine an' Rainbows ain't unshakable after all, huh?"

I smiled at that comment. I guess that really is the appearance I'm giving, huh? It's not a bad one, I'll admit. I chuckle nervously in response. "Yeah...", another sigh, "I just really wish everything was back to the way before all of this happened... at least we were all friends still..."

"Yah...", agreed Merida, looking rueful, "I'm not one to go back on 'er word, but sometimes I wish I could take back some of my actions... that lad Hiccup didn't deserve all of this, and we all acted like a buncha morons, fallin' for Monobear's plot like that."

"Well... At least we're talking to each other now, right?", I offered, meekly.

Merida blinked as if she hadn't quite understood what I had said, but her befuddled expression broke into the first warm and genuine smile I had seen since yesterday. "Yah... I mean... I couldn't really ever stay mad at ya, Rapunzel. Of all the blokes here, I know you're trustworthy."

That seriously warmed my heart! I had never considered myself trustworthy! There was a lot of things I didn't know and I wasn't reliable aside from my paintings, but to think that there were people here that found me worthy of trust! ...If only the circumstances surrounding us were more favorable... but this still made me very happy!

...And yet, unease and sadness still clouded my heart. Sure, the two of us were talking once again, but the others... were not. They still were skulking around, doubting each other, and not making up. And Monobear was still out there, plotting his next motive. And there were still a lot of things that were up in the air, mysteries to be solved. We don't even know if the file was real or not!

And Hiccup... where was he?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack POV<strong>

I lunged for cover behind a tree and though I was panting heavily from all the running around I had been doing, I stood as quietly as possible so I could hear if they were still on my tail. It wasn't long before I heard the clumsy steps of Snotlout as he crunched and ran through a brush on the opposite side, closely followed by some less cumbersome steps from Flynn.

"Where is he?! Did you see where that dumbass ran to?", asked Snot, as he no doubt tried to find me. Bothered by the fact that they could walk on me any moment, and that I had no idea where they were, I decided to get a vantage view on them by climbing the tree. It was weird, really, how natural it was for me to climb things, but I guess that's the perk of repressed memories... things never really do disappear from your mind.

Despite how tired I was, I was still able to deftly and quietly climb to a nearby branch. Using the thick foliage from the trees' crown, I peeked down and sure enough, there they were... the two teens standing dangerously below the spot I just had climbed from. I couldn't see their faces very well, but I could tell they weren't very happy. But I knew that already. That's why I was running from them.

"No, I did not.", answered Flynn, looking annoyed as he crossed his arms. "Y'know, this wouldn't have happened if you hadn't struck Jack. Like, this was supposed to be just an interrogation, not torture, you idiot."

Snot shrugged. "Hey, you know how that white haired freak is. Chances are he was gonna dance around the issue like a pansy, so brute force was totally necessary!"

"Do you even hear yourself when you're talking?", shot back Flynn

with a groan. "Whatever. The mess is done. If we want answers from him, we have to catch him so let's keep looking. He couldn't have gone far."

With a grunt, Snot took off and ran deep into the forest, Flynn following closely. I held my breath until I couldn't hear any sounds from their running and only then did I relax a little. As I tried to even my heartbeat, I gingerly touched my half-lidded right eye and hissed. Yep, I was sure that was already starting to bruise. That asshole really cleaned my clock this time. I'm surprised I managed to run away and not, you know, pass out from the hit. I felt a little silly feeling proud about that but in my current situation, any kind of small victories are good enough for me.

At that thought, my mood soured once more.

"\_Right... my current situation."\_

It was bad enough that I was practically being hunted down by those two because of their suspicions against me, and their hunger for information. They thought I had something to do with the Mastermind's plan due to the fact that I was supposed to be dead as that file stated. Of course, hell if I knew something about that. I really... don't know what the hell is up with me or who I am, and that file only made things worse.

Yes, it was because of that file that things had turned for the worse. A cold feeling spread through my chest as I remembered the cruel reality on that newspaper clip Monobear had forced on us.

My sister was dead. My dear, sweet, mischievous and annoying but smart Emma. Gone. And I hadn't... I hadn't even know... no, I didn't even remember that...!

I had done my share of crying and moaning and grieving yesterday but even now I still felt empty and drained of all energy and drive to do anything. The only reason I managed to survive Snot's "interrogation" was because my survival instincts kicked in. But even now, I still couldn't help the tears that threatened to escape. I suddenly felt like nothing mattered anymore and in truth that was most likely the case.

I had no home to return to, no family to welcome me back. Nothing. I had no motivation to escape, nothing to look forward to.

I was plagued by the realization that I had lost everything. From the very beginning, I had lost all that mattered to me, beyond the memories I had lost. It really...

It really didn't matter to me if I died or if I lived now. Everything was dreadful, either because of me or because of something I couldn't control.

Somehow, I had managed to destroy the only happiness I had here as well, only adding to my already dismal mood. In the heat of the moment, in the sorrow and anger that swirled inside me as the news of Emma's passing had been delivered to me, I had said hurtful things, things that I didn't really mean, to the one person who had put up with my bullshit, who believed in me no matter what. The one person who had cared for me and loved me and trusted me in this

hellhole.

And I hated myself for it. I was so ashamed of myself, and I had pushed Hiccup away. It was one of the biggest mistakes of my life that I can remember, and I didn't want to dwell on it but... but the searing pain of loneliness and aching in my heart was a constant reminder that I had done something I couldn't take back. I didn't have the courage to even face him; I was too afraid of being hurt once more. I could probably take the hurt from someone else, but not from Hiccup.

So all I could do is... avoid him.

\_"Heh... I bet he's already happier without me... he DID use to say that I was a pain in the ass...\_"

With those toxic thoughts and loneliness and pain from loss and the bruise on my eye, I sat on that tree, away from everyone and everything. I lost... no, time lost all meaning to me as it passed on, and I certainly paid no attention to it or the day as the sun moved through the sky slowly, the forest changing in coloration as the day drew to a close.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup POV<strong>

Work.

I had to keep working.

This iron must be hit like so while its still hot... and then it must be cooled in water... although the snow would probably cool it off just as well.

No, don't think of the snow and funtimes. Just focus on working.

That's right, this iron frame needs to be exactly 30 centimeters long. It's looking perfect.

Gotta keep my mind on finishing... whatever this is.

Oh right... I was scrapping the tail fin I was building for Toothless. It won't be useful anymore now that...

Gotta keep working. Yes, don't think on anything else.

Work is all I've been doing since yesterday. It keeps my mind occupied from wandering and-

Right, I gotta focus. Do stuff with my hands, no matter if the thing is useless. But this won't be useless. I bet it won't be. No, I designed this on a whim but I'm sure it will work, unlike the rest of the stuff on my life like-

No, it will definitely work. It's pure genius, I swear. A flight suit. Yes, kinda like the ones people use when they go skydiving. I'm recycling Toothless' tail fin and refurbishing it. With this, I'll surely glide. Yes, with this I can escape. I can use this to glide

over the gates and then I'll be free. Away from this horrible place. Away from-

I can't stop it this time. This time around, his face comes into full shape and I drop the iron frame I was holding, not caring about the racket I was making in the forge. No one was going to come visit me anyway, and no one cared about me. I was alone.

That was the reality that was hovering above me. The fact that I was all alone and I had messed everything up. No family, and certainly no friends, no bud... no Toothless. And no Jack.

All I wanted was to get away from this.

I began to tear up. I wanted that to stop too. I wasn't supposed to cry. Vikings don't cry! And I-I made a promise...! I was supposed to smile and bear all despair and misfortune that came towards me and keep moving forwards. But I couldn't honor that promise...!

"I-I'm sorry... Aster...!", I said to no one but myself as I blubbered and cleaned my nose with the sleeve of my shirt.

I couldn't keep that promise up. I wanted to run away from the pain, and my mistakes. It was because of me that people had died. I was surely hated by everyone now, and no one outside this place cared for me. I just wanted to leave; anywhere was fine! Anywhere is good... As long as I could forget about this...!

But even I couldn't run away from the fact that everything was a mess and that it hurt to even think about all of this. The fact that I had started to cry once more proved this. I wanted to tear out my heart and smash it to pieces with the forge's hammer. Maybe that would ease the pain.

I don't know how much time passed before I managed to calm myself down. Crying left me exhausted and even more so when there was no dragon friend to comfort you... or a boyfriend or a friend really. Feeling more than miserable, I decided to stop working today. My mood was a wreck already and I didn't have it in me to keep working on the flight suit. As I began to put everything back on its place, a sudden voice startled me, making me drop the iron frame once again.

"Ah... so this is where you were..."

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Merida POV<strong>

Ugh... this day had been such a drag. And the day before that too.

It was always like this when that whole Class Trial dealio happened but today was especially dreadful. Everyone was on edge and moody and the whole campground was empty as hell.

The only savin' grace had been that Blondie over here had actually talked to me. Compared to the cold shoulder everyone had been givin' me, this made my day brighter.

But I was still annoyed because everyone else was actin' like

buttfaces. It made me want to smack some sense into 'em because this wasn't the time to be all distrustin' and crap.

These were the times when we had to stick together, especially against that damn Monobear. Had they forgotten what Astrid and Aster said?

...Of course, I had a fault on this too... if I had stood up for that wee lad Hiccup, maybe help him diffuse the tension instead of bein' a doubter... maybe things wouldn't have went sour between us.

But that was wishful thinkin'. And what was on the past was in the past. I had to focus on fixin' things up on the present. At least Blond-, err, Rapunzel and I were on speakin' terms. But now...

"What should we do...?"

I spoke outloud, and Rapunzel looked at me with a confused glance.

"Are you talking about the others?", she asked and I nodded perhaps too earnestly. Darn, this girl was good at discernin' stuff without havin' to explain myself.

"Yeah like... I'm not very good at speakin' and stuff, but I feel like we have to do somethin' or else everything will go to hell."

Rapunzel thought about what I said for a few moments before nodding in approval. "Hmm, true... I'm kind of nervous too, but I guess all we can do is round everyone else up and speak about this. That's all we can do."

"Sounds like a plan.", I said and I stood up immediately before I started to doubt myself. "Let's do it then. We are burnin' daylight so let's get to it!"

Rapunzel blinked and then stood up with a nervous "R-right", but before we even moved a step, the doors to the restaurant burst open and in walked two people of our group. Huh, looks like we had our job cut for us a little. Fishlegs and Tooth had just walked in and judgin' by their startled expressions, they weren't expectin' us. We weren't expectin' 'em either but I'm not complainin'.

"Yo.", I greeted back as casually as I could. That, thankfully, eased off their nerves a lil, and they walked in with less guarded expressions, but still not quite sittin' next to us. Still, at least they had answered my greetin' with a small wave of the hand. They looked pretty rough around the edges, Tooth wearin' a tired smile and her hair being a disheveled mess, and Fishlegs was wearin' his shirt backwards but I didn't have the heart to point it out to 'im.

Yet.

An awkward silence fell on the room and I suddenly started to double-think my plan. Thankfully, Rapunzel was oblivious to the fact and she smiled sincerely at the two before speaking up.

"So, how've you guys been?"

Tooth and Fishlegs looked genuinely perplexed, as if they had realized they had permission to speak. They even looked at each other as if to confirm that they weren't dreamin' this up. Tooth smiled nervously at Rapunzel before answerin'.

"O-Oh... I've... been a little tired, but I'm fine!"

"I haven't slept well. At all. But I'm fine, I guess...", answered Fishlegs tiredly, the bags under his eyes proof of that. Yikes, that didn't look good...

"Yeah, same deal over here. Just tryin' to live my life and all, you know how it is...", I answered tryin' to sound non-committal, but as soon as those words left my mouth, I realized I had just cut all conversation short. Darn.

A somber look fell on Tooth's face as she surveyed the restaurant. "Huh... I never noticed how... \_big... \_ this restaurant was... now that we have so few people here..."

At that, I too noticed that. It was true... there was like, what, nine of us left? Out of our group of sixteen...

"Yeah... it's really quiet too...", commented Rapunzel with a grimace. "It's kind of unnerving how... not noisy this place is when you compare it to back when we first arrived."

"It doesn't help that... now all of us are scattered around either...", added Fishlegs, "I've been always a loner kind of guy, much preferring to read by myself... but I was getting used to the ruckus and energy and all and now... I kinda miss it."

A general hum of agreement sounded in the room. It was true. Annoyin' as they were, the Twins were the moodmakers of this group and now that they were gone, with no messin' around, no stupid squabble or idiotic comments... this whole place was dead as a doornail. Whoops... probably not the most appropriate observation.

It was in that shared silence that \_his \_annoyin' voice filled the restaurant. As usual, Monobear had decided to pop out of thin air, standing on a table where we could all see him. However...

"Where is he?"

There was somethin' very off about the Headmaster. Usually, the goofy bear would ramble on about somethin' idiotic in a childish and loud voice, movin' around and prancin' like an idiot before he let a bombshell of a motive drop on us. But not this time. This time, Monobear was looking very serious, and all playfulness and mirth from his voice was gone. It was replaced by cold anger.

"I repeat. Where. is. He?"

Now, this was odd.

"Who... are you talking about...?", asked Fishlegs, nervously. Why was Monobear askin' us about someone and their whereabouts? Didn't this damn bear know everything that happened in this camp? If so, shouldn't he had already found out this person he is lookin' for

instead of askin' us?

"Don't play dumb with me, fatty.", answered Monobear fiercely, takin' Fishlegs aback. "I know he is around here somewhere and that he is trying to speak to you all, so you better fess up. Where. IS. HE?"

"Are... you talkin' about Hiccup...?", I tried, hopin' to make any sense out of the Headmaster's odd behavior.

At that, Monobear groaned. "Ugh, no. I know where that wimpy loser is.", He shook his head. "Nevermind. It looks like you guys really don't know about him so he probably hasn't contacted you yet. I must hunt him down before he ruins my perfect plan."

More cryptic remarks before Monobear disappeared, leavin' very confused about this weird exchange. Another mystery to add to the pile that just doesn't stop from gettin' ever taller.

"What was that all about?", asked Tooth as she stared at the spot that Monobear had occupied.

"You think he was looking for one of us?", asked Rapunzel as she bit her nail.

"No", answered Fishlegs immediately as his brow furrowed. "We've been told by Monobear that he knows what happens in the camp at all times, and he has certainly shown proof of that. He... must be looking for someone else..."

"Someone else...? But I thought we were the only ones who were in this whole darn camp.", I said, not quite graspin' the concept. Didn't Monobear say we were the only ones here...?

"So... if its not one of us...", began Tooth, her face slightly brightenin' up as a thought dawned on her. "Does this mean someone from outside infiltrated the camp?! Maybe... help from outside has come?!"

The pause that followed that comment was abruptly cut short by Rapunzel snapping her fingers.

"Yeah...! That makes sense...! Monobear is only able to monitor us all... so he's probably trying to find someone from outside!"

"And he probably would hunt that person down, yeah... it makes sense!", added Fishlegs.

Help from outside... It seemed too good to be true. And yet, it seemed to be just that, accordin' to our brainiacs here. And I wasn't goin' to argue against that. But if that were true, then we had no time to waste here being pessimistic. There would be time to lick our wounds later.

"We have to find that person before Monobear finds 'im and eats 'im for brunch. C'mon, let's go!"

They didn't need to hear me twice. All the hesitation and gloom they had wore on their faces had been replaced with determination. It wasn't like we had overcome our pain and sadness, no. We just had a



goal now, somethin' that gave us hope, an opportunity we had to seize in order to escape this horrible despair. And we had to protect that hope before it was torn asunder by a very wicked bear.

With that thought in our heads, we ran out of the restaurant and into the camp grounds, in our search for this mysterious individual that had eluded Monobear's all-seein' eye.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Hiccup POV<strong>

I recognized the shape of the person that stood in front of me. The small stature was there and the gait was present too. But the similarities between the person I was familiar with and the person standing before me ended there. Whereas the person I was familiar with had black and white fur even separated and smoothed over, this one was entirely white, and with rough patches of fur dirtied with mud and dirt.

Whereas the person I was familiar with had a red, menacing eye and a mocking grin that extended far more than the one on his white side, the person I was looking at had no such eye, instead sporting a bandage wrapped around the left side of its head, and an even grin that looked gentle. It even seemed to have a permanent blush on its cheeks.

I was familiar with Monobear's appearance. And the person... no, thing before me looked just like Monobear save for those stark differences I pointed out.

I was instantly wary. Why was this not-Monobear looking for me?

"Oooh man... I seriously thought he was going to find me before I contacted you, but yaaaay! I'm so glad I found you at last!"

I grabbed the nearest wrench next to me. It wasn't a good weapon but I could at least brandish it like a sword if I needed to.

"W-what... what are you...? Why do want to speak with me...?!"

This thing... spoke in a bubbly manner like Monobear but without all the malice behind the words and it was unnerving. Was this Monobear's next motive...? Or was he something apart from the Headmaster...?

As he saw my wrench and my aggressive expression, the not-Monobear thing recoiled and put his paws over his head, cowering in apparent fear.

"Uwaaaah! Please! There is no need for such violent behavior! I am not an enemy and I will answer your questions without resorting to violent interrogation! Please lower your mighty wrench, wee Hiccup!"

I only lowered the wrench a little, but still held it at ready, mostly out of spite due to the name this thing had used on me. Seriously... wee? I waited for the not-Monobear to explain itself.

Sensing that I would not attack him any soon, the not-Monobear sighed with relief and stood up at its full small height.

"Right... I should begin by introducing myself! Teehee, silly me~" it said, sounding disgustingly cute and putting a paw behind its head bashfully. "My name is Shirokuma, and I'm here to rescue you all!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>suspense suspense suspense<strong>

\*\*cliffhanger aaaaaand\*\*

\*\*scene\*\*

\*\*b\*\*

\*\*Well, that was all from me today. Hopefully I will update sooner this time around but life is rough sometimes. Anyways, see ya later :]\*\*

## 36. 4 - Chapter 4 - Log B

\*\*Chapter 4 - Desire for Execution\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Geez, I apologize for the long wait. I said I would try to update these regularly but things just haven't been working for me so well. Rather to make empty promises, I'm just going to say that the story isn't dropped at all and that it will take me longer to update. So yeah, without further ado, here we go!<strong>

\*\*This chapter... was written with the desire to deepen the bonds between the students that aren't Hiccup or Jack. I know I haven't shown them bonding so I'm gonna work on that.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Log B: Signs of a Counterstrike<strong>

\*\*Hiccup POV\*\*

That explanation didn't do anything to put my mind at ease. Nor did the introduction explain much. I wasn't going to let go of this wrench any time soon, that was for sure. I wasn't really going to attack this... Shirokuma thing first though. Not only did I dislike being violent, if this thing that looked like Monobear was just another ploy of the Headmaster... then attacking it could count as if I had attacked the Headmaster himself, and that would be some lethal rule-breaking right there. I had experience in combat but I wasn't so sure I would last long against the Headmaster's punishments.

Shirokuma sensed the tense vibe I was giving off, and it started to sweat visibly and fidgeting in one place. I hated to admit it, but the technology behind these bears was certainly impressive. "You don't seem too happy about all of this, huh...", muttered the white bear in a low, anxious voice.

At that, I rolled my eyes. "Talk about the understatement of the century.", I answered, not feeling particularly interested in talking to Monobear or Monobear-look alikes, as I was sure the sarcasm in my voice was making it clear. "Your name tells me nothing and your claim of coming here to rescue us doesn't make sense at all. Why would any of this make me happy...?"

Shirokuma sighed, looking sad. "Yeah, I suppose you guys wouldn't trust something like me right away, given what you guys have been through and all... but you have to trust me!", a calm, confident aura enveloped Shirokuma as it looked at me with a determined face. "I really did come here to save you all! And I want to tell you all about it, but I can't do it right here! If Monobear finds me, he will surely destroy me and then my rescue plan will fail!"

"Rescue plan...? Are we... are we really getting rescued?", I asked, trying to not let my guard down just yet.

Shirokuma eagerly nodded. "Yup yup! Don't worry guys, \*\*the Future Foundation\*\* has a plan to rescue you all! But I need everyone to hear this, so I need you guys to gather in a place where Monobear won't be able to see us!"

A small flicker of hope flared up in my chest at that. Being optimistic just because of this strange thing's words was a foolish mistake, I knew, but somehow hearing the name of the Future Foundation riled up my spirit. In this maelstrom of despair and death... was it possible that we had been thrown a lifesaver in the shape of this plush toy? Was escape really a possibility now?

Well, it was nice to believe that, sure, but there was one tiny big problem with all of this.

"That's going to be hard... uh, because Monobear knows everything that happens in this camp."

Shirokuma giggled at that. "Oh, he claims that, yes! But if he really did... then why isn't he popping up out of thin air and destroying me?"

At that, I clammed up. Shirokuma... had a very good point. "Are you saying that he has a blind spot...?"

Another earnest giggle escaped Shirokuma's snout. "I am his blind spot, sort of! Yes, I know that sounds very vague, but I really should explain this to you all later on when we are together! Don't worry, I'll find us all a safe place so we can talk talk taaaaalk! Even though I'm a blind spot, I'm not an eternal one, so I really need to hide before he notices something is amiss!"

Shirokuma took a deep bow before waving at me childishly. "It was nice meeting you, wee Hiccup! I'll see you later!"

And with that, it ran away, not stopping even though I called its name.

...That had to be one of the most bizarre things I've ever experienced in my entire life. And I once had to help Gobber change the dentures of a Whispering Death.

Nonetheless... I was intrigued. This all seemed too good to be true...

Could I trust this Shirokuma...? I had no reason to do so, but at the same time, hearing the Future Foundation being mentioned made me curious. Well, if I wanted answers, all I had to do was show up and I certainly had enough motivation to do that.

And yet... at the same time...

If Shirokuma was going to round up all of us to tell us its rescue plan... then that meant Jack was going to be there... and I didn't know if I had the courage to face him. I had ruined everything with him for sure, and I didn't want to face that. More than half of me wanted to bail on Shirokuma's plan and just avoid the pain that seeing Jack would cause me... but the sensible part of my mind managed to restrain me and convince me, ruefully, to go.

I steeled myself as much as I could, and then I cleaned up the forge and the work table I had set up for this flight suit business, and sat down on one of the little stools that the forge had available and waited for Shirokuma's signal, whichever it might be.

I... had a lot of thinking and mental preparation to go through.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack POV<strong>

My eyes fluttered open and in that moment, I realized that I had fell asleep from the exhaustion that only grief could provide. I hadn't slept very well yesterday, so it was only natural. Still, it took me a while to realize where I was and what time it was; it was noon, judging by the sun's position, so I had slept the morning away, and also judging by the pain in my rear I had fallen asleep on the tree I was using to hide from Flynn and Snotlout.

I sighed and then carefully stood up on the branch and stretched. I felt like shit mood-wise but at least my body was well-rested. Seeing that neither Flynn or Snotlout were around, I deftly made my way down the tree, dropping on all fours and staying hunched over as I cautiously surveyed my surroundings for any signs of those two. When no sign came, I let out a breath I was holding in and stood up, ready to go to... anywhere where I could be alone with my thoughts.

"I'm disappointed in you, Mr. Overland."

I instantly turned around to face in the direction of that voice. It was coming from behind the tree I was just on. Just as I expected, from behind that tree came the owner of that smug, conceited and collected voice; Pitch. He was looking at me with utter contempt, and at once I tensed up. I wasn't in any mood for condescending nonsense and I wasn't in the mood for more Pitch mindgames; I couldn't gauge his intentions no matter how much I looked at him... all I knew is that he was angry... no, disappointed he said... at me. But what was he going to do with that emotion to me? I guess... I could just ask...

"What do you want, Pitch?", I said, trying to make it clear that I

didn't want to talk to anyone, especially such an unnerving character like him.

"You are scared.", he said, not as a question, but a fact.

"Wha-", but before I could express my confusion, he pressed on.

"They do not call me the Ultimate Fear Expert for nothing, Mr. Overland.", he stated matter-of-factly as he walked towards me and I could feel my body tense up even more. He was right... but I wasn't going to admit that. "You are scared right now, of me... and of something else."

I scoffed, trying to mask my discomfort. "Pfft, scared of you? Why would I be scared of your pale, thin ass?"

Pitch rolled his eyes as he startled to circle me in slow methodical steps. "Do you ever get tired of masking your insecurities behind that idiotic bravado of yours, Overland? Because frankly, I am tired of it."

I could feel those eerie yellow eyes of his scanning me, prodding at every part of me. "You have always thought of me as a scary individual; I've seen it on your face, on those small flickers of nervousness and fear that show up every once in a while, the ones you think you've hidden. But the body always betrays the mind and I am well versed in the tells of someone who has experienced fear. You are afraid of me, this is obvious to anyone who has eyes."

I... he had read me like an open book. I wasn't terrified of him, and in fact, I had tried to befriend him back on the first day before all this murder nonsense happened, but he did give off a scary vibe. And then he turned out to be a classist piece of shit, sort of, and I wasn't exactly keen on the guy. Though nowadays... I was beginning to think better of him after he apologized to me... and yet now he was being unreadable... which scared me as well. When you don't know how someone would react, or act at all, or think... you start to fear them. A fear of the unknown.

"OK, so you may be right.", I half-admitted. I still don't wanted to give him a full victory. He was smug as it is. "But so what? You got to admit you're pretty creepy looking, so can you blame me?"

Pitch chuckled as walked behind my back, a low but definitely amused sound. "I suppose I cannot fault you for that, seeing as that my frightening-looking persona was intentional, but I did not come here to discuss your fear of me." I could tell he had stopped moving, and for some reason, I was afraid to turn around and look at him.

"What I came to discuss... is your cowardly actions towards Haddock... Hiccup."

Even hearing his name sent waves of pain through my heart. I merely grunted in response, casting my eyes downward. I didn't want to talk about this. I didn't even want to think about him. But Pitch didn't stop prodding.

"Why haven't you taken reconciliatory action? Why are you here, hiding, instead of trying to make amends?", he went on, and I wished

I would go deaf on the spot. My hands were trembling with anger and annoyance; I didn't want to hear this because I already had heard this from myself a lot, tormenting myself with these questions. Why hadn't I sought Hiccup instantly the moment we had that stupid fight? Why didn't I go and ask for forgiveness right away?

Because I was a coward.

Because I was afraid of facing him and hearing a no, being denied forgiveness. I was terrified of his rejection; I would understand if he didn't want to get back together with me, and I could probably live with that... but what if he refused to even be my friend? What if he started to ignore me? That would certainly destroy me. That's why I ran away and why I keep running, but...

"Are you okay with this? Are you content with drifting apart? Would you rather never see each other again?"

Pitch's question was unneeded and it was driving me to the breaking point. With great difficulty to keep all the frustration inside me from leaking out: "Of course I'm not OK with that.", I muttered.

Pitch didn't sound impressed with my answer. "Then why are you hesitating?"

That did it. I hated that patronizing tone in his voice. He was playing dumb with me and I hated when people did that. As if I were an idiot or something. Pitch knew why I wasn't doing anything. And the fact that he was playing dumb while asking these leading questions pissed me off.

"Please, as if you didn't know already!", I spit out, angry at him, and myself. "It's because I'm scared! What, can't your freakish talent tell you that?!", I continued as I stared him down, or tried to anyways. "What do you even want from me? Are you trying to torture me or something?! Are you getting a kick out of this? Out of my fear, huh?! I bet you're getting a kick out of this! You're having a laugh at the coward who is too afraid to even try to patch things up, huh? Is that it?!"

Pitch just stared at me in silence, not even flinching at my outburst. Completely at ease. That frustrated me even more because I... I didn't understand why was he doing this! Why did he incite me to yell at him?! Why...!?

"If you think I am getting some amusement from your behavior, Overland, then you must be far more stupid than what I gave you credit for.", answered Pitch, looking bored. "Frankly, I am disappointed in you; I thought you were an honest and earnest individual, and yet here you are, wavering at the first signs of trouble."

"What are yo-", I began, my head hurting too much due to stress to even try to decipher what he was getting at, but the next set of words that left his mouth stopped that sentence dead in its tracks.

"I thought you... loved Haddock?"

A complete disconnect of mind. That's how it felt as I heard those words, as I tried to process them. Yeah... it would have been obvious to Pitch... I mean, we weren't exactly trying to hide the fact that we were together. But... why was he even asking? I mean, if he noticed how affectionate Hiccup and I were... then why even bring that into question?!

"...Of course I did-", I began, but then he interrupted once more.

"You did?"

...I did...? No... That wasn't quite how I felt.

"I do. I still do."

I was surprised by the sureness in my voice and the calmness that uttering that phrase gave me. I did like Hiccup... no, given the fact that this was affecting me more than I had expected... yeah, I guess what I really felt towards that viking was something far more stronger than just simple like. It was probably silly of me to say so... but I guess I did love Hiccup. We only knew each other for two weeks and yet I claimed to be in love... but if my memory could be trusted, if that memory I regained in the hospital... of me and him being in a relationship during Hope's Peak... if that memory was real, then he and I had been together for far more than year. So, it wasn't strange to say that I loved him... because even though memories are gone, the feelings behind them are never quite forgotten.

And those feelings were real; I wanted to protect Hiccup, I wanted to stay by his side. I wanted to make him smile, I wanted to make him feel safe. Of all the things I was unsure of, those were things I was completely sure of.

Pitch sighed and interrupted my soliloquy. "So, if you still love him as you claim... you should do something about it. Go after him and make up. That much you should be able to do."

At that I grimaced once more. Sure, my feelings for Hiccup were real, but I... even realized that the current situation between us was bad. Sensing my hesitation, Pitch sighed once more and looked at me with a stern face. "I have a question for you, Overland." and that obviously caught my attention.

"What do you think of fear? Do you believe it to be good or evil?", he asked, and I was once again, caught off guard in a span of less than five minutes. What kind of question was that? What did it have to do with anything he had said to me right now? Or what did it have to do with me? Still, the look in his face was expectant, and the lighting in this forest made him look even more intimidating than usual, so I was kind of compelled to answer. I gave the subject some thought, and thankfully Pitch didn't seem to be in a hurry, so once I gathered my thoughts, I spoke up slowly.

"Well... what do I think of fear?", I snorted derisively and pointed at me. "Look at what its doing to me. I'm a mess; I have hurt the one person I loved the most in this place and I should be making amends and yet look at me. I'm too scared to move a damn muscle, scared of facing Hic... I'd say fear is pretty bad, at least for me."

Pitch looked at me with a blank stare and then smiled, his eyes closed, as if he had been expecting that kind of answer. A brief but tense silence followed, broken by his stoic voice. "I see... but wouldn't you say that the prospect of never talking to Haddock ever again is far more frightful than anything else you might conjure in your mind? And doesn't that fear motivate you to try to make amends? To fix things between yourselves?"

I... didn't have an actual answer to that. Yeah, Pitch was right, in a way. I would do anything to prevent that scenario of Hic and I never talking. In fact, just thinking about it made me not want it to happen at all and almost made me bolt towards the camp and find that brunette and apologize to him over and over and-

And in that moment, I somehow managed to understand what Pitch was trying to get at with his early question.

I don't know what kind of expression I was wearing on my face, but the Ultimate Fear Expert seemed to be content with what he was seeing, and he took that as a signal to speak once more. "It seems you have realized what my talent truly is all about." He started to pace once more as he spoke, "As the Ultimate Fear Expert, I am capable of identifying a person's fear with astonishing accuracy, based on things like tells, nervous twitches, expressions and mannerisms. And though most people assume that I use this information to disarm and disable others, and manipulate them... the truth is quite the opposite."

Pitch stopped his pacing and he stood in front of me, looming over with his tall stature as he observed my face, looking for anything on it. "While it is true that it would be quite easy for me to use my talent for selfish reasons... That is not my intention. I was called to Hope's Peak Academy by the school itself, true, but the reason I attended the school was to use my talent to spread hope; to help others. For you see, Overland... identifying your fears is the first step in solving the problem.", Pitch smiled and this one was actually not smug or arrogant or eerie at all, but... it was an actual smile. "And when you have someone like me, who is able to discern the root of that fear as a guide to help you overcome it, it is even easier."

...I get it now.

"So... all of that... all that needling, all those questions you asked me... you weren't trying to make me feel bad about myself... but rather, you were trying to spurn me on? To motivate me into getting out of this funk...?", I asked Pitch, reeling a little. It \_made sense sort of... When I thought about it, Pitch was creepy and a jerk, but he was helpful and though aloof, he helped diffuse the tension between us always and directing us and reminding us of what was important at the moment. So this kind of behavior was... to be expected. And yet, I couldn't help but to find it also a little odd. Sure, Pitch seemed to be the kind of guy who would do something to preserve the status quo and he has acted like such before but...

...But why did he bother so much with me, to the point of seeking me out and using his talents of me? Wouldn't it have been easier for him to wait... for this to blow over? I don't get it...



Pitch smiled as he heard my spoken questions and nodded slowly. "Ah, perhaps you aren't as dull as I thought...", a low chuckle escaped his lips as he stepped back, his arms behind his back. "What you said is true, Overland. Fear can indeed be a negative and stifling force preventing us from ever doing anything, but I believe it can also be a stimulating force, which is why I did what I did. And now all you have to do is go and reap the benefits of your courage. For you see, Overland, true courage is not absence of fear, but acting upon that fear and overcoming it."

Yeah, I get it now. And he was right; I wasn't cured of my fear of facing Hiccup at all, but I still... wanted to try at least. I'd rather do this than not doing anything, that would be worse. I... I had to do this.

I couldn't believe I was going to do this but as I took a deep breath and I psyched myself to search for that Viking that still invaded my thoughts no matter where I was or how I was feeling, I turned around and smiled genuinely at the black haired teen in front of me. "Thanks, Pitch. I really mean it."

"Just don't mess this up any more, Overland.", He said in a more familiar arrogant tone, but I knew it was a half-hearted jab; he was still wearing that sincere smile.

I was surprised by the laugh that escaped my lips. Compared to my previous mood I was feeling much more better. Hopeful, even. And I had to thank all of this to that creepy guy I was leaving behind as I ran towards the Lodging Area to search for Hic. Who would've thought Pitch was such a great guy to even bother with me? A few days ago, he hated me, and now he was helping me.

It was an odd change, but I welcomed it. After all, he managed to inject me with much needed hope.

...

Unfortunately, that hope didn't get me far, because as I arrived to the Lodging Area, a figure was blocking my way. A familiar figure and yet at the same time different.

A completely white, bandaged up Monobear was standing in front of me and I tensed up at once. The way it was standing in my way, looking at me expectantly with that familiar grin... made it seem like it was expecting me.

Familiar yet different...what was this thing, and what did it want from me?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Hiccup POV<strong>

\_"Please come to the cove hidden deep in the woods of the Winter Resort!"\_

Those instructions were delivered to me by Shirokuma not long after he presented itself to me. In fact, I hadn't even finished cleaning up the forge when the white bear came back and spoke to me once

again. And so, I found myself wandering around this desolate, resort that was also a replica of Berk, the town I used to live in.

It was really quite eerie. The similarities between the two places was incredible; they had even gotten the statues next to the Grand Hall's entrance down perfectly, even including the engravings I had left on the base of one of them back when I was little, err... littler.

It made me wonder if we were still in Berk, but that was impossible, clearly. Even if some time had passed since we entered Hope's Peak Academy, that wouldn't explain the existence of the camp. Sure, the resort resembled Berk; but it had a lot of differences as well. For starters, that motel and ski slope didn't exist back home, and neither did the A/V Room and that grand Library either. There was also the fact that Berk was an island and not a mountain like this resort. You know, an island? As in, surrounded by the sea? Thus there was no way a campground could be built around it, let alone a cable car system and such!

And yet, despite these inconsistencies, I found myself noting these little details that were only found in my village and that only I could have known about... It really was quite mysterious. How did the mastermind pull this perfect replica off? Did they have access to our stolen memories?

...Was I really accepting the fact that our memories had been stolen? It sounded ridiculous but in the light of all recent evidence, it would be far more ridiculous of me to deny it any more.

Really, I just kept denying it because accepting it would make it undeniably real, but it seems I have no other choice but to accept it; the fact that Monobear had stolen our memories was real. Jac-\_his\_ memories prove that some time had passed as well; that was the only reasonable explanation behind the existence of Jac-\_his\_ memories, so Monobear's claim that some time had passed was undeniable too. A substantial period of time of our lives had been stolen... An important part of ourselves, lost to us.

...Was that why Elsa's breakdown came out nowhere? We, as humans... we should have grown and developed during our years at Hope's Peak. Did... Elsa change into the person she was during the Class Trial during that time at Hope's Peak, when she became Ultimate Despair? And in forgetting that period of time, did Elsa start to act like her old self, before she got into school? When you think about it, that makes sense...

If that is true... is there... any good in regaining our memories then? What if...

\_What if I became a horrible person like her...?\_

...

Before, I had been eager to recover my memories, if only to verify the things Monobear was claiming. But now? I was afraid of the unknown. What if I had also become a member of Ultimate Despair like her...?

\_Well, I certainly am terrible enough to hurt the one person I loved

the most...\_

I shook my head, trying to not dwell in the negative right now. Sure, I felt like dying right on that spot, from all the pain I was feeling in my heart. But I couldn't die just yet...

Somehow, Shirokuma's appearance and promise of sorts had fueled my desire to live, if only slightly. If only to try and forget all the troubles I had caused him. Trying to focus on something else besides Jack, I took a better look at my surroundings as I left the "settled" part of the Berk replica/resort and I walked into the forested area Shirokuma had directed me to.

Like the Berk replica, this forest was incredibly familiar to me, a fact that I had noted back when we first searched around the place back when Monobear had forced us to endure a grueling period of starvation. The type of trees, and the layout was identical to the forest near Raven's Point back at home, a forest I had explored in search for trolls and other magical creatures during my childhood. Yeah, that gnarled root on that oak was there... and yes, that thin branch that always seemed to hit me no matter how careful I was was also there...

And if Shirokuma had mentioned a cove as the meeting place... then there was a high chance the cove it was referring to was the very same cove Toothless and I used to relax and unwind back at home. And yet, when we first investigated this place, and I noticed the similarities between these woods and Berk's, I searched for that very cove and I found nothing. That had baffled me at first, but after thinking about it, that cove was known only to me, so it made sense that the Mastermind had failed to replicate it here. There was no cove in these woods at all.

And yet now, Shirokuma had directed me to a cove in these woods. What could this mean...?

In my confusion, I didn't notice I had arrived to the cove on mere memory alone, having gone to that place many times on my life I knew the path by heart.

My breath hitched a little as I took in the familiar scenario and loneliness filled me. It was exactly like I remembered. There was that lake Toothless and I used to fish in and sometimes swim, somehow remaining in an unfrozen state even in the harshest of winters. There was that boulder where Toothless used to perch and sometimes hide behind to ambush me and get a rise out of me with that dragon chuckle of his. There was that tree that Toothless used to hang on from by his tail in order to sleep.

Everything... reminded me of him. And the fact that he was gone. And he was never coming back. I felt my eyes water but I hardened my heart as much as I could to prevent the tears from falling. It... wouldn't do to cry right now. Showing any kind of weakness in this place was... bad.

I carefully made my way into the cove through a gap in cliff walls, taking special care not to trip with one of the roots that had grown through the hard stone in their effort to live and soon enough I found myself standing in that clearing, feeling incredibly small and lonely.

That feeling didn't last much, as I heard the sound of steps coming from behind me. I turned around to see that Fishlegs, Tooth, Merida and Rapunzel had joined me, making their way into the cove as well. I had to admit I was impressed by the fact that Rapunzel had made her way into the cove just fine, without having her hair tangled in any of the various roots that dotted the entrance but then again she was always resourceful.

Once they noticed my presence, they stiffened, unsure of what to do, their eyes full of hesitation and their poses comically frozen in place as they regarded me. I... probably was looking the same as them; after the Class Trial's end, I wasn't keen on talking with other people, seeing how all of them considered me the traitor and would surely hurt me, fatally even. So even though my odds weren't good, my mind was already taking note of everything around me in case a fight was unavoidable.

I stiffened once Rapunzel broke off from the group and started to walk towards me, her mannerisms clearly showing that she was nervous. I could feel my heart beating hard against my chest, so I wasn't exactly the image of calmness either. When she stopped in front of me, two things happened that I wasn't expecting at all:

First, Rapunzel spoke:

"I'm sorry, Hiccup."

And then, she...

Hugged me.

The gesture was so unexpected, I didn't even register it consciously. My mind was still trying to process the meaning behind the words "I'm sorry.", What was she sorry about...? The answer came soon after, as she spoke during the embrace.

"We shouldn't have believed Monobear right off the bat. We doubted you without any proof and I'm so sorry about that. We probably made you feel bad... Sorry."

...Oh...

And then the fact that I was being hugged and being apologized to fully sank in. And the patented Haddock awkwardness made a full return. And to add to the awkwardness even more, Fishlegs, Tooth and Merida had also approached me and with eyes full of remorse, they spoke up too.

"I shouldn't have had doubted ya lad, that was wrong of me. Really, it was boorish of me to believe that damn bear without any proof."

"Yeah, Hiccup... Monobear's words alone SHOULD'N'T have been enough but in the heat of the moment... We just wanted to blame anyone and, yeah, we messed up on that... Sorry!"

"You have helped us a lot during the Class Trials and you have been affected by Monobear's plots the most of all of us. We shouldn't have doubted you like that! That's not how an accomplice to Monobear would

act!"

...Oh... so they... I was wrong then? They didn't hate me...? I wasn't dreaming? This...

The full brunt of the situation hit me and it was so surreal. I was always used to be on the receiving end of all the blame and to never receive apologies for anything that went wrong. That was the kind of life I was used to back in Berk. But now, this...? It was a weird feeling this one.

I managed to find my voice among all the surprise I was feeling and though it came out strained, I made sure to make it clear how grateful I was feeling to them. "I... I-I don't know... you guys, I... don't worry about it...! I-It's fine, really! I mean, I completely, uh... understand why you acted like that, its completely OK! I would probably have done the same so, I... i'M NOT mad anymore and I-I forgive you so, it's OK! Completely fine! And...! Well..."

"...Thank you."

Thank you. That's all I could say to express my relief and gratitude. I was so ready to try to argue my case or to fight my way through if I ever got confronted with those charges, but this really came out of left field. I really wasn't expecting an apology. I never thought... Someone would ever care enough about my feelings to apologize, let alone four people. In that moment, in that embrace, I felt a little relief, and a warm feeling spreading on my chest. My mind began to wonder... is this how friendship felt like?

Rapunzel broke the hug and stood back and I could see how sincere she was being with her apology on her eyes, watery with unshed tears. She really felt responsible for this, but her smile showed relief at my forgiveness. Heh, if only she could know how I felt... It was as if a weight, a burden had been lifted from my shoulders.

That's how I felt as I saw my class-... my... friends... looking at me with relieved smiles. I don't know how my face looked... but I felt relieved as well.

Of course, such a moment couldn't last long, because two more people had joined us while we were immersed in this, uh, apology session. One of them was Peter, who was regarding the scene with a curious gaze. And the other person who was accompanying him...

The other was someone who I wasn't ready to see just yet, because seeing him just brought to mind the mistakes I had committed, the hurt I had felt and reciprocated. I wasn't ready to see Jack just yet, but the Norns seemed to have something else planned for my future. He... looked terrible, paler if it was even possible, and the bags under his eyes were more pronounced, his hair misbehaving even more than usual and that heavy bruise on his eye... I wondered how he got that and I felt a pang of pain in my chest. Jack... Jack was like this because of my stupid decision to fight back. I didn't like being distrusted and being accused unfairly, but I also didn't want to hurt other people and now I was regretting everything as I saw the consequences of my actions in front of me.

Jack smiled tiredly at me, reluctant to meet my eyes, and he looked

like he had something to say. I... even if I had something to say, even if I wanted to apologize (No, I do want to apologize!), I couldn't. (Because I'm a coward). Because my voice... was just gone and my mind was blank. I wanted someone else to speak up, and break up the awkward staring contest between me and Jack, but they had unfortunately picked up on the tension between us and had wrongly decided to not interrupt in order to let us work this out.

Ooooh, I'd rather have someone intervene right now...

As if to mock my wishes by granting it on a roundabout and hurtful way, the last pair of people who were missing from our group of survivors joined us, and as you'd expect, the mood turned unpleasant almost immediately as Snotlout and Flynn joined us. And as I expected, they were not the kind of people to just forgive and forget. That was evident as their shocked expressions from seeing us changed into an outright scornful glare from Snotlout and into a suspicious stare from Flynn. Unfortunately... Snotlout's reaction didn't stop there.

"Hey! What the hell?! Why are you guys just standing there, without doing anything to the traitor?!"

Fishlegs was the one who summoned the courage to speak. "What do you mean by, 'doing something', Snotlout...?"

The Ultimate Heavy Lifter rolled his eyes. "Do I really have to say it?! This punkass nerd has been hidin' from us these past days because he's the traitor and he has info that he doesn't want to give to us. So now that he's here, why aren't you idiots interrogating him or something?!"

Flynn sighed. "Though to be honest, this is the kid we're talking about. I doubt he would really tell us anything outright... he's a tricky, smartypants one." he mumbled mostly to himself.

Snotlout's expression changed to a mischievous grin that sent chills down my spine. "Well, I haven't met any smartypants strong enough to resist my patented 'Snotlout Interrogation Technique'. I'll have him talking once he meets the "Good Cop" and the "Bad Cop", just you wait..." And as he said that, he cracked his knuckles and started to walk menacingly towards me.

Oh boooy... yeah, I was kind of expecting that. I... could probably take on Snotlout... evenly? At once my brain began to think of combat situations, since diplomacy was obviously out of the window. I wasn't a violent person, but upon being threatened, my mind switched gears, most likely due to the training my dad forced me to go through. And that's just how it was; I began to think in all possible scenarios and moves both I and my opponent could do and the strategies I should use in each event. I felt my body relax in a combat stance, legs ready to make any move. I knew what I was capable of, so that was good, but unfortunately, I knew barely anything about Snotlout. Sure, I knew he was probably very strong due to his Ultimate title, and I knew how people of his body type tended to attack... but that was only if Snotlout didn't have any combat training. If he was, hopefully, just a common... well, talented common bully then I could probably take him out without any grave injuries...? But if he was combat trained... then I was in a lot of trouble and foreseeable pain.

All the scenarios and mental preparing I was doing and envisioning didn't go far enough, because Jack had decided to interfere, much to my surprise. Like before, the white haired teen had stepped in front of Snotlout almost instantly, his arms spread out to block his way. I hated... how he had put himself in harm's way for me again, but my heart swelled with hope as I processed his actions...

Jack... had once again tried to protect me... willingly. Did he... does this mean he still cares about me? Yeah, I don't think someone would do something like that knowing they would get hurt without a reason like that. So... is there a chance for me to fix this after all...?

What happened next also betrayed my expectations. Because it wasn't only Jack who had tried to shield me. No... Merida, Rapunzel, Tooth and Fishlegs had too. They... were standing in front of me. Not in any way near Snotlout or Flynn, unlike Jack who was right in the Ultimate Heavy Lifter's face, but they were still covering for me.

...I had to remind myself it was pretty weak for a Viking to cry, even if he was moved by something incredibly.

Snotlout's and Flynn's face mirrored my own stupefaction, but Flynn quickly recovered. "What... are you guys doing?", asked the Ultimate Thief, not looking amused.

"We're not going to let you guys hurt Hiccup.", answered Tooth, sounding completely sure of herself.

"Why the hell not?", asked Snotlout, "He's the traitor! Monobear said so! He's working with that bastard! Hurting him shouldn't even fucking matter!"

"I wonder...", spoke up Peter, who had stepped aside but then had decided to join the new 'Hiccup Defense Squad' as he stood behind me. "Can we really say for sure that Haddock is the traitor?"

"What are you getting at, pal?", asked Flynn, his gaze lingering on the Ultimate Fear Expert.

"Think about it, Flynn.", said Fishlegs, "What proof do we have that Hiccup is the traitor? The only thing we have is Monobear's word."

"And ya damn well know that the bear's word can't be trusted, Rider!", pointed out Merida.

"But he hid information from us!", retorted Snotlout.

"What if Hiccup was telling the truth and he simply forgot to tell us?", said Rapunzel, taking up my defense. "We... did go through a lot and had a lot in our minds so-"

"What, so you're believing his words, but not Monobear's?!", interrupted Snotlout once again, looking incredulous.

"Of course we are.", answered Jack and I couldn't believe how much I missed his voice, deep and confident. "Why wouldn't we? Really, I'd

believe Hic's word over Monobear's any time, without question. He's been on our side all this time, and he's saved your ungrateful ass, Snot. So of course I chose to believe him.", Jack's voice lowered to a threatening tone, as his stance grew visibly tense, "And if you want to get to him, you'll have to go through me."

Judging by Snotlout's glare, I could tell he was seriously considering it. Flynn simply shook his head and stepped back, obviously not wanting to get involved in this altercation, but still directing a suspecting stare at me.

"P-Please! There is no need for such violent displays!"

Shirokuma's shrill voice intruded in the scene, and it was funny, you could say, how all of us whipped our heads towards the direction of its voice at the same time. There it was, in all its Monobear-like glory, standing near the edge of the lake that sat in the middle of the cove, its hand near its chest as as it looked at us with a worried expression. I hadn't seen it come in so maybe it was waiting for us here, hidden? Or did Shirokuma possess the same teleporting ability that Monobear had?

"E-everyone, let's get along! You're all friends, right?! Friends shouldn't doubt or fight each other like this." pleaded the white bear as he walked toward us with a clumsy gait.

That snapped Snotlout out of his stupor. With an ugly snort, he prefaced his speech, "Friends? As if I would ever be friends with the traitor, the one who is helping Monobear with his deranged plan!"

"You're wrong, Snotlout, sir!", spoke up Shirokuma, "About the traitor, I mean! As a member of \*\*Future Foundation\*\*, I can guarantee you that there is no traitor among your group and that Monobear is lying!"

The silence that followed Shirokuma's claim suddenly exploded into a cacophony of questions. It was as if someone had thrown a match into a powder keg. Even I joined in on the questioning of that white bear; in my franticness for answers that I wanted to have, Thor damn it, I forgot to restrain myself.

"Wait, Future Foundation? \_You're\_ a member of Future Foundation?!", I asked, taking Shirokuma by surprise.

"Who are you, anyway? You just suddenly appeared and then asked us to come here, so what the hell are you?!", inquired Jack.

"And why do you look like Monobear? Are you like, his brother or something? If you're with Future Foundation, does this mean Monobear is in cahoots with them?", queried Rapunzel.

"You said you came here to save us before asking us to come to this cove... how are you gonna do that?!", questioned Fishlegs.

"Also, what the hell is up with this newspaper the fishbone showed us?! What's up with these riots?! Is this newspaper correct?!", interrogated Snotlout, thankfully non-violently.

"Hey, do you know who the Mastermind is?! Who is behind this?",



quizzed Flynn.

"Or why are we trapped here? What's the bloke's plan for us and why us?!", asked Merida.

"Really, any kind of information would be great! Just please answer us!", pleaded Tooth.

"Y-You guys...!", shouted Shirokuma, apparently too overcome by the bombarding of questions. "P-Please! If you guys keep talking, I won't be able to answer your questions! So can you guys please hold for a second so I can actually talk? P-pretty please?"

It was difficult for me to accommodate that request, but I had to. Shirokuma... did have a point. We can't get any answers if we don't let them talk, so I stopped. And so did the others. Shirokuma took a moment to regain its breath and bearing, despite the fact that it was a robot and had no reason to do so. And then, it started talking.

"Right-o! I guess we'll begin with the introductions!", said the white bear as it put a paw on its chest. "My name is Shirokuma... but you guys already knew that! Tee hee~"

"I am indeed a member of Future Foundation... but not an official one. I am more of a... tool, you could say. For I am an **\*\*AI\*\***. That's short for **\*\*Artificial Intelligence\*\***!"

"AI?", interrupted Snotlout, "The hell is that?"

Peter rolled his eyes and sighed, the exasperation clear. "Honestly, your simple-mindedness knows no bounds."

"H-Hey! I react better to praise, you know?!", retorted the Ultimate Heavy Lifter.

"In any case, allow me to educate you.", continued on Peter. "An Artificial Intelligence is a computer program that is essentially sentient. Unlike normal computer programs, an AI learns, adapts and sometimes even expresses feelings. Well, that is mostly on science fiction, though."

"Wee Peter is correct.", said Shirokuma and the look of offense in Peter's face was priceless as he heard the nickname. "I am not a real person, which is what makes me different from Monobear! Unlike Monobear, I am not being controlled by anyone! It's just plain ol' Shirokuma here~"

"Well, you don't look that different from Monobear in my opinion..." said Merida, looking at the white bear through a half-lidded glare.

"T-That's only because the Future Foundation salvaged one of the Monobears from the **\*\*riots\*\*** and used the remains to create me! I assure you, my intentions are as pure as my white fur and my only goal is to save you!", defended Shirokuma, looking agitated.

"...Your white fur seems to have been cheaply painted up...", observed Fishlegs, his voice sounding unimpressed.

"Yeah... seriously... It's... not a very good paint job...", said Rapunzel, trying to not sound harsh, but... yeah, I guess an Ultimate Painter would know.

"Backing up a little...", said Flynn, cutting in on the conversation. "So you said... that Future Foundation made you from the remains of a Monobear?"

"Weeeeell... not entirely. I mean, sure, my body is from a Monobear, wee Flynn... but the AI was created, I'm told, from the blueprints left by Chihiro Fujisaki, the Ultimate Programmer from the Old Hope's Peak Academy. Even now, his legacy on the field of programming is still present, even three hundred years after The Tragedy...", answered Shirokuma.

"I see... so then... then the file the kid found is telling the truth...", Flynn's tone grew somber and low, a whisper almost. "There really... is rioting on the outside world... with Monobear bots.."

"Monobear killing bots running amok killing people... our family and friends missing... and an order to not go outside without gas masks... because of the Despair-Syndrome, maybe...?", said Tooth, her face pale. "Is... is that all true...?"

"S-so... all those people mentioned in the file... Emma... all of that is true... they're all dead...", said Jack in a hollow voice and I couldn't stand the expression of utter despair in his face. It looked wrong, his blue eyes devoid of any light and life.

"W-Wait... hold on, wee ones...!", said Shirokuma in a frantic voice. "It's true that there were some riots and Monobear killing bots in the outside world like the file states but...! \*\*All of that is under control thanks to the Future Foundation\*\*! All of that is a thing of the past, honest to Betsy! The file is only a half-truth fabricated by Monobear!"

...What in the...?

"And also... those names and the list of victims is wrong! I can confirm it with a quick search in my database; your families and friends are alive!", finished Shirokuma with a content and confident tone on its voice.

"...Is that true? You ain't messin' with me?", asked Snotlout, looking relieved. Shirokuma simply nodded earnestly.

"What a relief... I'm honestly so glad...!", said Tooth with a tearful smile. "I was so scared... to think that there was nothing outside of this horrible place waiting for us... that was too much! But now... now I can finally keep on living... there is something to look forward to!"

It was as if all the tension between us had evaporated after Shirokuma' claim fully sunk in. All the confusion and dread I was feeling was... gone. And there was hope... I thought I was all alone, but my dad and Gobber were alive...! There was someone out there waiting for me...!

"Still...", said Peter, looking grim. "Even if we are to believe your word... that still does not change one fact; there were riots and Monobear killing bots \_at one point\_. Adding to that the worries of Tadashi Hamada about the the possibility of Ultimate Despair returning, worries that drove him enough to plan a countermeasure in the shape of the Hope Restoration Program, and the dairy of Hiro Hamada and its contents referring to a catastrophe afflicting the school and surrounding cities because of Ultimate Despair and the Despair-Syndrome... It is clear that the situation outside is hardly taken care of, as you claim."

Peter... had a point. Even if Shirokuma was right and all the incidents mentioned by Tadashi and Hiro were taken care of, that still didn't explain what was going on on the outside world.

"...I guess there is no point in denying it...", began Shirokuma, crestfallen and forlorn, "It's true that things outside are tense... and its also true that Ultimate Despair is involved and making its move..."

"But how can that be?", asked Fishlegs, "I-I mean... according to the files we found from the Future Foundation... Ultimate Despair was disbanded a long time ago, right? The Mastermind and leader, Junko Enoshima, was killed, and that's why society was able to flourish once again, no?"

"You are correct, wee Fishy.", said Shirokuma as it raised its head slightly to see the Ultimate Encyclopedia. "But... the Ultimate Despair that is behind the riots that Future Foundation suppressed and the Ultimate Despair behind the **\*\*Biggest, Most Awful, Most Tragic Event in Human History** are two different organizations\*\*."

...!

Shirokuma continued talking, ignoring our shocked silence. "The ones behind the riots call themselves **\*\*Neo Ultimate Despair\*\***, and like the preceding organization... they hold the same beliefs and goals of spreading despair. And... we at Future Foundation think that they're behind your imprisoning and this Camp Trip of Mutual Killing as well."

"B-But...!", interjected Fishlegs. "How... How is that even remotely possible? I mean... didn't Junko Enoshima and her ideals die back in the past?! Why would... how could someone do something like this again?!"

"We... don't know.", admitted Shirokuma, looking crestfallen. "Future Foundation has no idea how this group arose... and worse, we have no idea who the members of the organization are. Just like the previous organization, identifying the members is very difficult! In fact, the identity of most members of Ultimate Despair was only uncovered well after the Tragedy subsided. They aren't... exactly the kind of people who yell that they're members of Ultimate Despair unless they're cornered."

"Well, isn't that just grand?!", shouted Merida, making us flinch. "You're tellin' us you Future Foundation lot suspect that them Neo Ultimate Despairs are behind this, but ya don't even know who they are?! What, you're tellin' me you guys don't know the identity of the

mastermind behind of our imprisonment too?!"

Shirokuma positively shriveled up in shame as it covered its head with its paws. "S-Sorry... those guys are pretty sneaky and even when they are in the open, they vanish as soon as their job is done. And the Mastermind behind the Neo Ultimate Despairs is acting just like Junko Enoshima, not revealing themselves at all despite being the leader...!"

"Just... just like Elsa.", I said, and I knew that caught everyone's attention because I could feel the intensity of their stares all over my body. "Like... we didn't even know Elsa was part of Ultimate Despair until she regained her memories. If you think about it along those lines... any of us could be a part of that organization... without even knowing."

"No, it is worse than that...", spoke up Peter. "Right now, we are living relatively at peace with ourselves, content even. But if we were to regain our memories... we might end up like Elsa Arendelle. We might end up discovering a truth we do not want, and we might end up becoming a person we do not want to be; a reprehensible, horrid person that is responsible for atrocities forgotten. The person we truly are, but that we've forgotten."

The mood grew so heavy it felt like it could crush me right there. It was getting hard to breathe all of a sudden. Elsa's hateful words floated up in my mind; she had called me a person who hurt others and ruined everything. Did... did she meant... the person who I was with my memories...? The person I became during my stay at Hope's Peak Academy and that I forgot?

If something horrible lies in our memories, is it even a good idea to recover them...?

"Ha... hAHAHAHA...", Flynn's laugh sent a chill down my spine, the disbelief clear on it, "You gotta be kidding me. So you're saying, that the world outside might go to shit any time soon, and to top it all off, if we ever recover our memories, we might end up being part of some psychotic despair worship group that almost ruined the world? What kind of fucking joke is this?"

"N-not only that...", said Tooth in a quiet voice, "But even if the Future Foundation got the riots under control... Neo Ultimate Despair is still out there right? They surely... have more Monobear bots ready for another attack and they have the Despair-Syndrome on their side..."

"Is... is it really OK to even go to the outside world then... is it even worth it?", asked Fishlegs, voice almost a whisper. "W-Wouldn't it be better... to just... stay here?"

"C-Come on, you guys...", said Jack, trying to defuse the tension with a smile. "We can't just stay here, right? I mean... our friends and family are out there. We have to go see them... right?"

"H-he's right, wee ones!", spoke up Shirokuma, trying to bat away the cloud of despair that was slowly descending over our heads. "And besides... it's not like \*\*we don't have a plan back at Future Foundation\*\*! That is why I came here to rescue you!"

...Jack was right. Yes, there MIGHT be bad things waiting for us out there... but the white haired teen was right. We couldn't just stay here. I... I wanted to see my Dad and Gobber again. So, I had to just soldier on, just a little bit longer.

"You keep sayin' you have a plan and that ya came to rescue us but, how are ya plannin' to do anythin'?", asked Merida, the incredulity on her voice clear, an eyebrow raised. "No offense, Shiro, but ya ain't look capable of takin' on Monobear..."

"...It's because of my cute looks, isn't it?", asked Shirokuma, blushing.

More like... unreliable and defenseless.

"Anyways! Trust me!", said Shirokuma with pride. "I may not look like it, but I have many talents, both as an AI and a Monobear! That's why Future Foundation assigned me to this mission!"

"Talents... like what?", prodded Rapunzel, looking curious and excited and very expectant and I was afraid her expectations were going to be dashed.

"For example... I was able to find you guys due to the technology inside this body! Apparently, all Monobear units are able to sense the approximate location of each other, which is quite useful because this camp you guys are in \*\*has a strong jamming signal surrounding it\*\* and hiding you guys from any other tracking and monitoring devices!" explained Shirokuma. "I'm a hundred percent sure that the Mastermind set that signal for that very reason."

"I see... so that's why no help has come for us... no one can find us because of that signal...", mumbled Flynn.

"So you were able to find us because you were built from a Monobear...", said Peter, "But... would not that apply to Monobear as well? He should know you are here in this Camp, and he is sure to find you any second now and ruin your plans of rescue."

Shirokuma shook its head, a knowing expression on its head. "Ah... silly wee Peter. There is no need to worry! Future Foundation thought of that and modified me accordingly! You see, I am able to sense Monobear and his location at any time, and while he can tell I am here, he can't actually know where I am exactly because Future Foundation messed up with the sensor inside me. As I am now, I'm like an invisible fly to Monobear! \*\*A blind spot that hides the location of anyone around me as long as they're nearby!\*\*"

Rapunzel clapped her hands excitedly. "I get it! So that's why you gathered us all here! So that we could rendezvous here and discuss things without the risk of Monobear finding us!"

"Huh... gotta admit, Shirokuma, you certainly are impressive.", said Flynn, a smirk on his face. The white bear was visibly blushing at the compliment, and I had to agree. That was impressive technology alright.

"Aw, gee, come on, you're praising me and I haven't done anything yet... you wee ones are too much!", said the bear with contentment.

"I... have reservations about this.", said Peter. "Are you sure Monobear won't suspect you and find you? He has stated time and time that he can see everywhere on this camp. Will he not notice the blind spots in his surveillance and find you?"

Shirokuma turned towards Peter and giggled. "Aw, wee Peter, you care about me!"

Judging by the look of disgust in the Ultimate Fear Expert's face, I don't think he cares that much...

"But don't worry!", reassured Shirokuma, "Like I said, I can tell when Monobear is nearby thanks to my sensor, so if I sense him coming, I'll just run away! Also, \*\*the Mastermind can't see the surveillance feed and control Monobear at the same time! \*\*So I'll just hide when he comes looking for me, and by that point I'll be invisible to his surveillance feed."

"Besides...", said Shirokuma in a low voice. "After this... and after I begin my work... you wee ones and I... we won't ever meet again."

...Huh?

"What... do you mean by that?", asked Snotlout, looking unsure.

"You see... there was a reason I chose to call you all here on this very location.", said Shirokuma, sounding down and forlorn. "I chose this cove because this is the only place in the entire Camp where Monobear doesn't have any cameras or monitor. This is a true blindspot... but even so, using this place constantly would be too dangerous. In fact, if we kept meeting after this talk, Monobear would surely move on from targeting me... to you guys. He would surely try to interrogate you and maybe punish you for information..."

Shirokuma looked like... he was crying... even though he was a plush toy/AI. "Above all, that is something I cannot accept. It goes beyond the plan for your rescue failing... I... don't want any more hurt to come towards you."

"So that's why... after my plan begins, we will never talk to each other ever again. For your safety. Is... is that clear?"

An uncomfortable, awkward silence. That was our answer to Shirokuma's petition. How... was one supposed to feel about this? Relief? Joy? Sadness? We... we were going to be saved... Future Foundation, no... Shirokuma was going to save us. We should be happy, right? Then why do I feel... uncomfortable about this? Is it because, despite the fact that Shirokuma is just an AI and we just met it... they truly care about us enough to push us away? It felt as if... we were sacrificing it. Using it.

"You... still have not told us what your plan for rescuing us is...", said Peter, his gaze firm on the white bear. "Without knowing that... I don't think we can agree to any terms."

"Oh... right. Silly me...", said Shirokuma with a smile and a slight blush. "I'm going \*\*to hack into the Camp's mainframe and disable the

Mastermind's control over the facility. \*\*If I do that, I'll be able to free you guys and you will be able to escape. I should be able to connect to the mainframe through that \*\*ominous-looking clock on the Meeting Grounds, no sweat!\*\*, a dark shadow fell on the white bear. "That will be...my first and last job as a member of Future Foundation."

"What are ya sayin'?!", asked Merida, looking outraged. "Don't tell me you're plannin' to make this some kind of crazy suicide mission!"

"Hee hee, don't be silly, wee Merida.", said Shirokuma with a gentle smile on its plush features. "This isn't a suicide mission. I'm just an AI! I'm not alive and I never was! So... that technically isn't a suicide mission. I'm just doing... what I was programmed for. I am a \*\*one time use executable AI\*\*, whose sole purpose is to save you guys."

Yes... this... this felt very wrong. It was stupid of me to feel that way. What was even wrong with me...? It wasn't long ago that I distrusted Shirokuma so much, to the point of threatening it with violence. And now... I was conflicted about his essential sacrifice. Why...?

It was because Shirokuma was being utterly sincere. As an AI, it was designed to act like this. It was... just doing his job. Which is why it felt... wrong. But... there was nothing we could do. Shirokuma had to carry out its mission and we... had to comply. Because that would mean that... all would be over.

That's what I told myself over and over to make this easier.

"Just leave the rest to me!", said Shirokuma jovially in contrast with the heavy mood. Everyone, save Snotlout who was looking relieved and Peter whose expression was inscrutable, looked conflicted and saddened to a certain degree by this. "Just live out the few days it will take me to hack into the mainframe in peace and harmony with each other! The distrust and pain and death will soon be over! I promise. So just get along, OK?"

"Just... don't lose hope, you guys. No matter how dire the situation is, no matter how much you have suffered... just believe that everything will be OK! Just believe in that, and don't lose yourselves to despair. And leave everything to me.", finished Shirokuma.

So... this is how it ends.

All the death, the distrust... the pain, the suffering, the cruelty and betrayal and despair... this entire situation, our tale... is over. It's going to be over soon. We never quite figured out what the purpose of our capture was. Why it was us. What was the plan of the Mastermind for us. We never learned who the Mastermind was.

Yes... there are a lot of unresolved things. But... it should be OK to leave them unsolved, right? We have gone through a lot during our stay here, so we deserve a happy ending like this, no matter how incomplete it feels, right? It should be OK for us to leave everything in Shirokuma's hand, and simply wait to be rescued right?

...

Even I... don't know if this is the ending I wanted. But we can't always get what we want. I've learned this the hard way... I would have liked for all of us to escape, alive. But obviously, that is impossible now. So... I guess I should take what I can get. Moving forward... that is what hope means, right?

...

We all agreed to Shirokuma's plan, some more reluctantly than others. We understood that we couldn't just stop the AI from carrying out its orders, but it left a collective bad taste in our mouths, despite Shirokuma's constant "It's OK, really! I will be fine! This is what makes me happy! Honest!"

Without much fanfare, we all left the cove slowly and taking our separate ways as to not alert Monobear to our location. And so began our last days at Camp Despair. The hopefully peaceful and uneventful days.

All my conflicted thoughts about this were halted when someone grabbed my wrist. I had been walking on a lonely trail in the familiar woods, and I was surprised that someone had found me. I waited with bated breath for the other person to talk, not daring to look at them. Why? Because I felt apprehensive despite our imminent rescue. When that person spoke, that feeling rose tenfold.

"Hic... we... we need to talk."

Jack's voice did a lot of things to me in that moment. It made my heart soar, yet also sting with pain. It made my stomach flutter but also churn. And it made my mind wonder and think. "\_He is talking to me again!" \_and \_"Why are you talking to me?" \_being the main thoughts.

I summoned some courage and turned to face him, and we looked at each other silently. As I stared into his face, it was clear to me he had something to say. Something very important that he wanted me to hear. And it was something that I wanted to hear. Really, despite my apprehension at meeting him, and the pain we both caused each other... I wanted, above all, to talk to him and apologize. I thought it impossible before, but Jack himself had given me that opportunity right here. No doubt it had been hard for him as well, to gather the courage. So, even though I was nervous and a little bit scared about what he wanted to say to me, I wasn't going to squander this opportunity to talk to him, to try to make amends.

With resolution in my heart, I nodded as firmly as I could. "Yeah... Yeah we should."

We started to walk towards the main camp grounds. We... needed to find a place to talk properly. In silent agreement, Jack followed me as we made our way to the shore of Lake Despair, trying to collect my thoughts on what to say to Jack.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>How's that for more exposition and another cliffhanger.



Dang i'm good<strong>

**\*\*Next chapter will be the last. Thank you for subscribing to my story.\*\***

**\*\*...ok im just pulling your chain!\*\***

**\*\*In any case, see ya guys on the next chapter, whenever that happens. Review and all that jazz if ya want! See you next time~ And as always, thank you very much for reading! \*\***

#### 37. 4 - Chapter 4 - Log C

**\*\*Chapter 4 - Desire for Execution\*\***

**\*\*Log C: All All Apologies\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sorry for the long wait, and for the short chapter, in advance. Things have begun to get very busy in my life and in all honestly, my motivation to continue this story is waning with every passing day. I'm not dropping it, not after coming this far, but updates will likely be as sporadic as of late, or even more so. It's hard to keep pressing on when interest wanes off from both parties, but I digress. For now, enjoy this! Hopefully the next update will be closer than you guys think.<strong>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Jack's POV<strong>

It's odd.

No matter what's going on in your life, the world around you carries on, completely unaffected by the troubles that plague you, your problems barely a noticeable blip in the grand scheme of things. That's how I felt as I made my way back to the camp grounds and away from the freezing heights of the winter resort Monobear somehow had conjured in this camp. Right now, a plan, a scheme for our escape from this horrible and twisted place was brewing, and yet the camp... the world surrounding us was completely at ease. The summer breeze blew across the camp softly, barely disturbing the evergreen trees.

Yeah... despite the storm brewing around us and the hurricane of emotions swirling inside me, the world was completely at ease.

I... obviously was not.

I was trying to come up with what I wanted to say to Hiccup... to get my point across to him clearly... that I wanted to apologize. That I wanted to... you know, make up and take back everything. But... even though I had resolved to do so, the words didn't come out. My mind drew a blank and it was so frustrating because the \_feelings \_were there, but the words...!

That's why I was following Hiccup to where he was leading me to, to buy myself some time. And honestly...? My mind was still as blank as

before.

Still, I was kind of relaxed... OK, somewhat relaxed about this. Because the fact that Hiccup wanted to actually talk to me and listen and the fact that he was following me... it gave me hope that everything was going to be alright.

That didn't make me any less nervous, though. Especially once the destination I had in mind for this little chat was getting closer and closer.

In shared silence, Hiccup and I arrived at the shores of Camp Despair. Once again, I was taken aback by the pristine beauty of the lake. I wasn't the kind of guy to wax poetry, but I had to say it, the lake was damn pretty alright. And also... it was the place in this camp that held the most precious memories for me. So it was only natural that I would chose this place to try to make amends with this little viking. We slowed our pace until we stood just a couple of feet away from the water's edge and I promptly sat down, crossing my legs in the process, in order to try to get the few words I had managed to think up in order.

...

...

...Yeah, I'm kind of panicking internally now.

Hiccup sat down next to me and simply stared at the lake's surface, his legs stretched out in front of him, his hands idly playing around with some loose pebbles. He's not saying anything. I, too, begin to stare at the lake and admire it...

...

...

The silence between us stretches on.

...

...

Yeah, this is... getting incredibly awkward. The only noise is that of the waves against the shore, and our occasional shifting of positions. C'mon, Jack... you can do this...! Just do as Pitch said...! Use that fear of never talking to Hiccup ever again to motivate you to talk...!

"You know...", Hiccup spoke up first, taking all the wind from my sails, "As I see this lake, I've realized... we've gone through a lot, huh...?"

I look over to the lake and nod. Yeah, he was right... Even though we've only been here for half a month, a lot of nonsensical, sad things happened. But amidst all that despair... yeah, it was cynical of me to say, but a lot of good things happened too. I guess, that's just a fact of life, right...? I mean, I don't know a lot of life, but I suppose that's how it is... because that's been the reality I've been forced to live here. It's not like I'm suddenly OK with all

the death and despair I've been put through, and I'll... never forgive the bastard who made us go through this... but I've accepted, somehow... no, learned that life... is not just black and white, either all good or all bad. We just... have to learn to live with the things that surround us.

And despite my empty existence, I've learned to appreciate the nice things that I have experienced.

"Yeah, like when we had that sparring session with Astrid and Merida...", I said, with a phantom of a smile on my lips.

Hiccup smiled slightly as well. "Right... how could I forget the first activity of the 'Protect Hiccup Squad?"; he chuckled, "the fact that I got to kick your ass in front of two girls was priceless too..."

He was making sarcastic remarks again... but did that mean he forgave me or not? I couldn't tell. But I didn't really care about that that much. I was... having a good time, actually, thinking about all these happy memories. "H-Hey... I think I did pretty good, all things considered...!", I retorted uselessly, covering up a smile.

"Yeah, right... you keep telling yourself that...", said Hiccup as he rolled his eyes. He then went silent for a brief period before speaking up in a hushed tone. "That... was a lot of fun, to be honest. Just hanging around with other people and talking, you know...?"

I nodded. "Yeah... just like that party we had here.", I turned to face him with a smile. "For someone who didn't have any memories prior to all of this, I gotta tell you... a swimming party with a dragon and delicious hamburgers is a pretty damn good memory to have."

Hic shrugged. "W-well, the burgers weren't that great, but yeah, I had to admit that I did have a good time. There was a lot of noise and of course Monobear was there... but I'd say it was pretty fun... yeah..."

I could see it in his eyes, he regarded the memory with fondness. But there was also a hint of sadness there, and I think I knew the why. Of course, there was no way he was going to just get over the loss of his best friend, the only one he had before all of this happened. So remembering all of this... yeah, it made Hic happy, but it also surely made him sad. Terribly so.

It still amazed me how strong Hiccup was. This was the guy who had such low self-esteem that he constantly undermined all his achievements. He had befriended a dragon, for gods sake! He was also incredibly smart and loyal. And despite all the loss he had gone through, he still refused to break down. It was awe-inspiring to see such a small guy put up a strong front like this... but it also worried me.

Just how much was he hurting? I wasn't an expert in human nature but I knew keeping things inside you wasn't healthy. I... just recently realized that when Pitch berated me for not being true to myself. Hiding behind a mask... it seems easy but if you keep living that two-faced life... you're bound to forget who you are in reality. And

that... worried me. Because I didn't really know who Hic really was. Or rather, I didn't even know what he was feeling.

I... I wanted him to trust me that much. I wanted him to open to me to that degree. Some day. Because... yeah, wow, this is really hard to say, even to myself. I loved him. Of that I was sure now. I could feel the blush creep on my cheeks. But that didn't matter. I really liked Hiccup, and I wanted to be part of his life, help him with everything I can, and shower him with the love and respect he deserves. I really wanted that for him, and I wanted to stay at his side no matter what.

Finally, I'm able to say a simple sentence. A sentence I shouldn't have stressed over with for this long; I will never understand why I was hesitating so much to say it, because I meant every single part of it. It was probably... because I was afraid of being denied forgiveness... but even so, I managed to say it to Hic;

"I'm sorry, Hiccup. I... I'm sorry, all those things I said to you... I had no right to say them. I'm really, really, really, REALLY sorry, Hic..."

Hiccup's eyes widened with realization, and he immediately adopted a flustered look on his face. "What...? Where did all that come from- No... wait... I know where this came from its just... you don't have to apologize for anything! I-...". Hiccup took a deep breath, closed his eyes and calmed himself down as I waited for his answer. He was done collecting his thoughts soon enough, and opened his eyes, looking stern.

"Yeah... you do have to apologize for that...", said Hiccup, enunciating every word carefully. "What you said, Jack... it really, really hurt me. It was uncalled for...", his stare fell to the ground, and his words and the tone of disappointment in it really tugged at my heart. The auburn-haired youth lifted his gaze and then stared at me hard, before changing his expression to a softer, and dare I say... embarrassed one.

"I... accept your apology, though. And I... I also want to apologize to you, Jack.", he said, pausing a little to arrange his thoughts. "I also... said some things that were uncalled for to you. Things that I don't really think or believe but that I said in the heat of the moment... I'm sorry.", he stared at me, his eyes definitely sad. "I... I do trust you, Jack. More than anyone on this camp, no matter the circumstances surrounding you."

"I, uh... I don't know what to say except... Thank you, Hic. And... I do forgive you.", I answered, honestly. It was true that Hic's words had hurt me before, but at this point, all I really cared about was his forgiveness; in my mind, I had already forgiven Hic for his insults, only because I felt responsible for all of it. That he had truly cared about my feelings like that only raised my opinion of him.

I was really... damn happy! I seriously couldn't explain it to you all if you asked me to. Relief and happiness were all I felt as I processed what was going on: He hadn't turned me away and we had forgiven each other. To some people, it may not seem like that big of a deal, but for me... it was incredible. I was so overjoyed I could almost shout about this eternally. And to make things even better,

Hic's following actions made me want to blast off into the air.

With some hesitation, and a definite blush on his face and some nervous mannerisms, Hic spoke up. "A-and... this might come out of nowhere and I do realize there's probably no chance of you saying yes but... uh, so what I mean is...!", Hiccup closed his eyes, afraid of seeing my response I assume, before continuing. "... Would you... like to, uh... how do I put this...?", the Ultimate Lucky Student awkwardly held his arms up. "Would you want to... have an awkward reconciliatory hug?"

This was honestly the most adorable and positive outcome for this situation. Hiccup... he was actually still hoping that we could go back together, and he was asking me in the most cute way possible. How could I possibly refuse? This is all I wanted from this and more.

I took the little Viking in my own arms and hugged him as strong as I could, but not as strong as I wanted to. It had only been a few days, but the yearning for this... was bigger than I thought. "It doesn't have to be awkward.", I answered, as I buried my face into his auburn hair and pulled him to me even more. I felt elation as I felt a pair of thin arms awkward close around me, but holding on as tight as I was. I... I really had missed this. No, I missed Hiccup too much and I hadn't realized it. Everything about him, not just physical contact... I had been craving it.

It dawned on me there how bad I had it for the Ultimate Lucky Student.

"...You're such a dork...", said Hic, his voice muffled a little because of the hug.

"And you're adorable.", I answered back confidently. Because it was true. I had the most adorable ...hahaha... boyfriend in the world! It still felt unreal to use that word...

Hic grumbled a little. "Geez, don't call me adorable. I'm a Viking! ...I though the stupid disease's symptoms had gone away already."

I chuckled and decided to play along. I DID remember some of the things I said to him in that state of mind after all. "But this disease is terminal, Hic, for you see... it is love!" I said in the most sappy voice I could muster and judging by Hic's dismal groaning, I'd said my delivery was top notch.

"Y'know Jack... suddenly pushing you into this lake is becoming very tempting...", said the Ultimate Lucky Student in a playful threatening voice.

We spent a few more minutes in a back-and-forth session that I had missed and after that, we separated but we held hands as we sat next to each other by the lake shore in a comfortable silence. Normally, I'd be all for noise but being by his side... made everything enjoyable. Even things that could be considered boring. But when I was with him, the word 'boring' wasn't in my dictionary at all. That's how I felt when I was with Hic.

I chuckled. This... I was going to lose this over a stupid fight and some stupid feelings of mine? Yeah, I guess I am that dumb. Good

thing Pitch kicked my ass into gear.

The freckled teen next to me looks at me with a questioning glance, before asking. "What are you laughing about?", with a raised eyebrow and an amused expression.

I shake my head, smile still on my lips, as I answer with a shrug. "Oh, nothing much. Just thinking how I'm going to repay Pitch for helping me out with this... whole stupid fight business... is all."

Hic tilts his head as he processes what I say. "Wait... Peter helped you out?"

The incredulous tone in his voice draws an amused laugh out of me. "I know, right? Who would have thunk that Pitch would care that much about us? But yeah, he gave me the courage to apologize to you, so I kinda owe him a lot."

Hiccup turns his head to face the lake once more, and after a brief silence, he speaks up again. "Then... I guess I'll have to figure out something too. He really... helped us out a lot. I'll think of something to make it up to him."

I nod to him before my smile grows even bigger as an idea forms on my head. I take his hand in mine and I relish the feeling of our fingers intertwining, the warmth flowing from his hand to mine. I give a small squeeze which makes him look at me with those green eyes of his. "I'll make it up to you too, Hic. Just you wait, I'll take you out on the best date of your life."

"What are you talking about?", says Hic as he tries to hold back a laugh and failing, the auburn-haired teen shaking his head.

"It's just... I read that boyfriends are supposed to take their partners out on dates and I just realized our relationship is sorely lacking in that department! Such grave mistake must be corrected Hic! Or else the world will go mad!", I said, trying to sound as dramatic as possible, which earned me a laugh from the Ultimate Lucky Student.

"Jack, our world is already pretty mad if you haven't noticed.", said Hiccup with just enough snark to make his point clear. "Can we even have a normal date on this place? I don't think a place called Camp Despair would be good enough for that..."

I placed a fist over my chest. "Leave that to me, Hic! I promise you, I'll plan the most absolutely perfect date you'll ever have!"

"It's not like I have gone in any dates before, Jack...", said Hic with a roll of his eyes. "But this, I gotta see."

Well, I haven't been on many dates either, but I will definitely do something great. I have to make it up to him, for all those horrible words I said to him. I'll make him forget them by making him have the best time of his life. Of that, I can be damn sure. "Great! Then I'll see you at your lodge tomorrow at night for Operation: Romance Camp!"

"That name is... totally... making me look forward to it already.",

said Hiccup as he laughed in between words, looking genuinely happy and at ease. And that, man... made my heart flutter like crazy. I just... couldn't have enough of him, of his voice, of his mannerisms... And just when I thought nothing could be more perfect than this, Hiccup did something completely unexpected.

After calming down from his laughing fit, the auburn-haired teen took some moments to regain his breath before sitting next to me in silence. Suddenly, his hand left mine and that made me look to him in surprise. The freckled teen looked deep in thought, a faint blush on his cheeks, as he deliberated something fiercely. Abruptly, he then turned to face me and he leaned in closer, and closer... and closer...

I expected a hug, but instead, I felt his lips quickly touch my cheek.

It was such a simple gesture. One I had read about and one that I remembered in that moment. My mom had given me many of these before; a kiss. And yet... even though the gesture was the same, the feeling behind it was clearly different. And the feelings \_I \_WAS having from receiving them were also quite different.

My mind soon caught up to the action. I... Hic had just kissed me.

Soon enough my skin began to heat up and boy, my heart began to thump even faster than before as it began to dawn on me. A kiss! It was just a kiss on the cheek but I could really just go up and fly around the world without stopping right now. I wanted to yell and make the world know about how happy, how exuberant I felt! Everything just seemed brighter all of a sudden. The gesture had been so sudden I was at a loss for words, not enough words to describe my happiness. And Hic didn't even give me a chance to answer.

As I stared at Hic with possibly the most dumb grin in the world, the Ultimate Lucky Student looked as red as a... something very red, from embarrassment and positively flustered. "R-right...! I'll see you tomorrow then...!", he said, and with that stuttering sentence, he quickly got up and walked away, not once looking back, probably out of embarrassment.

I was still rejoicing in the moment, replaying the memory on my mind again and again.

A reconciliation, a hug, a date and a kiss.

Such simple concepts, and yet all of them were deeper than that. All of them carried a meaning. They were an experience. Ones that I treasured.

I found myself wishing the day would go faster so I could get to next day's night for my date with Hic. And hoping for more from that freckled Viking. Today... had been a good day.

**\*\*Hiccup POV\*\***

As I ran away from that shore, a mixture, a cocktail of emotions and thoughts raged inside me. Happiness, for Jack had asked me for forgiveness and honestly, why would I deny him that? Ease, because we

had worked out our differences and I felt closer to him than ever. Excitement, because I... I had a date... something to look forward to! And not only that... we're leaving this place soon! Finally, a hopeful future is spreading before us.

But perhaps unreasonably so, the most potent emotion I was feeling at that moment was... embarrassment. I was feeling pretty courageous back then, when I took that leap of faith and followed what my heart wanted me to do... but now that I had kissed Jack, all I could do was stew in my own awkwardness, the blush in my cheeks and neck noticeable enough to people with eyes.

It had been just a simple kiss on the cheek! Nothing big or scandalous! So why do I feel like I want to die?! Geez, you're such a drama queen, Haddock!

And yet, despite the conflicting emotions inside me, I have to admit to myself...

...It was nice. It felt nice. Today... was a nice day.

And I... wouldn't mind feeling like this again, with him, every day of my life.

That's what I feel.

And with those thoughts, I enter my cottage and after tossing and turning here and there in my bed, I go to sleep.

**\*\*Monobear Theater\*\***

"I know I have complained about this before already, but I just can't stand hero types! You know the ones, the ones that constantly blab on and onnn about justice and goodness and purity and more justice! It drives me nuts, I tell ya!"

"I mean, who do they think they are? Waltzing into other people's business and forcing their values on them, resorting to violence when things don't go their way? To me, those hero types are the true villains in a story!"

"Especially if you take into consideration the fact that pure justice is just impossible to obtain! Justice always ends up hurting someone no matter what! That's why I can't stand hero types. Their very basic values and beliefs are in contradiction from the start!"

End  
file.